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BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

**All have the Same God?
Approaches to the Question of God
in Emergent African Theologies.**

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Editorial

In 1976, Franciscan missionary and theologian, Walbert Bülmann, alerted Western Christians of the shift of the centre of Christianity to the southern hemisphere—*The Coming of the Third Church*. Since then the issue has become a fundamental assumption of missiological discourse. Bülmann and colleagues (B. Krokosz and A.P. Doran) published in 1979 a journalistic account of life amidst Asian religions: *All Have the Same God: An Encounter with the Peoples and Religions of Asia*. In their view, theologians argue over the nature and focus of the worship of deity, but in daily life people appear to be worshipping the same God.

The 'catholic' historical insight has tended towards what Adolphe Gesché characterized as the preservation of the paganness of peoples encountered by Christianity. The Graeco-Roman world, while recognising the foundational value of the Bible narrative, nevertheless thought it important to adopt Cicero's moral inspiration and Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical insights. This practice is perhaps in continuity with the missionary insight of Saint Paul in Athens (Acts 17: 22-23).

Hitherto it has been acknowledged that missionaries in Africa confidently welcomed the 'unknown God' in the various cultures and among various peoples they encountered. Indeed Church historian, Lamin Sanneh, made the connection between rapid Christian expansion in postcolonial Africa as related to the preservation of the indigenous name of God.

Some African theologians and some Churches (especially new African Pentecostalism) are ill at ease with the genius of Catholicism, and the missiological insight of Paul on the question of God. In the shift of Christianity to the southern hemisphere, precisely to the African region, one is encountering peoples for whom the God of African Traditional Religions (ATR) is not 'dead', but has adepts practicing the religion and living side by side with Christians and influencing Christian practice. Theologians wonder about the sameness of the God worshiped by ATR adherents and Christians. The lingering theological question in

African theology is, does the God of ATR truly survive in the image of the God of Jesus Christ?

This issue of Bulletin addresses aspects of this question. New generation African theologians insist that the approach to God in African Christianity must totally embrace the historical sufferings of Africans and the present crisis Africans are passing through in the globalised world. Benoît Awazi Kungua therefore makes a strong presentation of the Crucified Triune God in Jesus Christ for the holistic liberation of Africans and all suffering peoples of the world.

The lingering debate that one still faces is that of methodology. Are the efforts of pioneer African theologians, who made strong commitment to the continuity between ATR and Christianity still defensible? Uzukwu, in conversation with three new generation African theologians highlights the critical approach of these theologians, the strong focus on the dogmatic responsibility of theology, and the ecumenical trend of their thinking.

Africa is passing through crisis, has been in crisis before and since the advent of modernity; there are numerous wars, pogroms and genocides. What God do they pray to in crisis? Omenka historically evaluates the role of God during the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970). Malu assembles the best position of the Kinshasa school on the relevance of ATR as way for effective reconciliation in Africa.

In this volume of the Bulletin, many more questions are raised than answers. However, the volume endeavours to address the spiritualities that take the limelight in the Africa of today as a result of distress and as a result of the globalisation of culture.

Elochukwu Uzukwu C.S.Sp.
Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka

From the God of the Ancestors to the God of Western Christianity: The Political Question of God in Postcolonial Africa.

By

Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua¹

Before I give a summary of the epistemological, theological and political argumentations developed in my book, *Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique. Esquisse d'une Christologie négro-africaine de la liberation holistique*², it is necessary to state my hermeneutical situation (*Sitz im Leben*). It is the basis from where I tackle the question of God in postcolonial Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa that is politically, economically and ideologically marginalised by political and economic powers that preside over the planetary expression of the consumerist and neo-liberal ideology.

My hermeneutical situation could be stated in the following question: Which God do African Christians worship in their enthusiastic and inculturated liturgies? In other words, has the God of Christians, which is also the God of the victors of the colonial confrontation, completely dethroned the God of the Ancestors? Are they one and the same God, if yes, under which theological and epistemological conditions? What transformation must the missionary and western Christianity undergo in order to vibrate at the same level with the therapeutic, cultural, political and spiritual demands of African Christians or Africans in search of God in this new phase of aggravation of the crisis of postcolonial Africa in the context of global economic recession whose consequences for postcolonial Africa are disastrous? I started writing this article the same day the G20 Summit opened in order to find solutions to the global economic recession. The quasi absence of Africa in this

¹ Kungua is Professor of Philosophy and Theology at St Paul's University Ottatwa, Canada, and also teaches French.

² L'Harmattan, Paris, 2008.

summit of economic super powers of the planet is evident through the insignificant representation of the continent by South Africa.

The question of the “God of the Blacks” is more and more omnipresent in communities of Africa and the Diaspora. This question is inseparable from the history of four centuries of black slave trade, slavery in North America and the Near East as well as the detonation of corrupt postcolonial dictators. It is not rare to see among the black communities of the West Indies and the Caribbean a popular and violent movement of rejection of western Christianity and her “god” associated (rightly or wrongly) with the imperial politics of white supremacy in the world. In the French West Indies where I lived for 12 months (October 2003 to December 2004), many descendants of African slaves embrace the African traditional religions (ATR) such as the *vodun* and the religions of pharaonic Egypt as distinctive marks of their disalienation from Christianity assimilated to the religion of domination of whites upon blacks.

Clarifying my Hermeneutical Assumptions:

I will start this research work on the God of the Blacks by stating the three concrete situations through which the “Black question” is expressed today. (a) The Ivorian Journalist Serge Bilé, known worldwide through his audacious and controversial books on the exploitation and racism which blacks suffered and continue to suffer in the world, has again published a book entitled *Et si Dieu n'aimait pas les Noirs? Enquête sur le racisme aujourd'hui au Vatican*.³ We see in this book revolting and absolutely unacceptable events in which black priests and religious women continue to suffer an open, structural and daily racism from Vatican authorities and in numerous churches in Europe. The events narrated in the book do not need any commentary and may push somebody to ask whether Blacks are at home when they claim to be

³ [Suppose God does not love Blacks? Research into Racism today in the Vatican!]

“Roman Catholic”. The book opens with a first chapter entitled “A black bishop attacked in John Paul II’s house.” Here are some extracts from the first chapter:

“Wednesday 8 June 2005. A Nigerian priest, John Okoro Egbulefu comes out of the Vatican in the company of an Italian apostolic Nuncio. They take the principal avenue, the famous Via della Concilliazone, talking about so many things when a red motor scooter pulls up close to them. A young man dismounts, immediately runs towards the African priest, a knife at hand, stabs him and leaving him for dead disappears into the night”⁴. Few years earlier, the Zairian bishop who was a secretary to Pope John Paul II was attacked.

“The misfortune of Egbulefu reminds the African community at the Vatican of another attack, even more mysterious, suffered some years earlier by the Zairian bishop Emery Kabongo, found on 12th August 1988 at Castel Gondolfo, the summer residence of the pope. He lay in a pool of blood; his ribs and jaw broken and his face shattered”⁵.

The book continues with testimonies of priests, religious women and other Africans that are victims of open racism in the Vatican. I quote this book because of the wide publicity it received in Canada where I live right now and reminds us of the malaise of a good number of Africans in the structures of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa as well as in the black Diaspora of Europe and North America. There are even cases where African nuns go into prostitution in order to survive and escape the bad treatments from the convents that brought them to Europe. There are also cases

⁴ Serge Bilé & Audifac Ignac, *Et si Dieu n’aimait pas les Noirs ? Enquête sur le racisme aujourd’hui au Vatican*. Pascal Galodé Editeurs, Saint-Malo, 2008, p. 11 (See also *Corriere della Sera* (9 Juin 2005).

⁵ Ibid. p. 13.

where priests live as illegal aliens because they could not renew their papers and are summoned by Vatican or the local churches which welcome or employ them to go back to their countries.

(b) The second element of my hermeneutical situation is the critique of western and missionary Christianity. I do not intend to reiterate this because I exposed it extensively in my book, *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*. There I studied the works of African theologians of liberation, such as Mveng, Eboussi, Ela, Hebga, Mbemba and Milingo. In this article, I wish to recall that the evangelisation of Africa took place in the political and ideological context of systematic “devaluation” of cultures and peoples of Africa and this determined for better or for worse the multiple and contradictory trajectories of Christian faith in Africa. Achille Mbembe whose critique reaches extreme limits writes:

This suffering was explained in terms of malediction. Indeed, among all the races of the earth, only the Black was “evangelized” from the dramatic perspective of the theology of malediction. The black slave trade and colonisation were almost presented as expiatory events necessary because destined to serve as manifestation of the glory of the God of western Christianity and as a place of anticipation of his promises for the cursed race. It is difficult to understand the conflict between Christianity and the black world if one does not take note of what, from “below” is still considered as a costly enterprise of authoritative definition of the status of the African all through the years⁶

(c) The third and last element of my hermeneutical situation is the situation of open epistemological and theological rupture between the African masses and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. We are witnessing the massive

⁶ Achille Mbembe, *Afriques Indociles. Christianisme, Pouvoir et Etat en société postcoloniale*. Karthala, Paris, 1988, pp. 41-42.

departure of Catholics and Protestants from the missionary churches that came from the West to join Pentecostal churches where charismatic pastors propose religious therapies to problems like witchcraft, poverty, sickness and search for happiness. It is impossible to ignore this movement of internal rupture in Africa and the black Diasporas of the West. The attention of theologians must focus on this massive phenomenon which has become the order of the day. Why all these massive departures of African Christians from churches of western missionary allegiance towards churches very close to Pentecostalism and radical evangelicalism? How do these Christians live and appropriate their faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour? Is it possible to treat these agitating questions without taking into account the phenomenological and theological knowledge of African Traditional Religion (ATR)? An evangelical theologian like Byang Kato demonises all the theological and symbolical dimensions of ATR as idolatrous and pagan in favour of the absolute unicity of Christianity while Bolaji Idowu promotes the divinities and cultural practices of Yoruba traditional religions and that of the Igbo in the elaboration of a Christianity inculturated in black African soil. I gave an account of this in my book on Anglophone Black African theologies⁷. It will be good to read the whole book especially the part consecrated to West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana...).

After a narrative and phenomenological recapture of the questions and problems which provoked my reflections and constitute my initial problematic, I will note three heuristic and hermeneutic grounds on which the argumentation of my book (*Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique. Esquisse d'une Christology négro-africaine de la libération holistique*) is grounded. First: the political question of the role of the Christian faith in the process of the total liberation of Africa, without which there will be neither

⁷ *Panorama des théologies négro-africaines anglophones*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2008, especially the section on West Africa, pp. 80-106. The principal thesis of Byang Kato can be found in his book *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975).

profound inculturation in Africa nor the reconstruction of democratic societies in Africa. This question calls for a demonstration of the prophetic and critical nature of the Christian faith vis-à-vis despotic and idolatrous powers of the postcolonial era. Second: the theological and exegetical question of reading the whole Bible in order to anchor the Christian faith in Africa on African cultural thought pattern. In order to solve this problem, I propose a narrative, phenomenological, mystical and Black African interpretation of I Kings 19, 1-21. This will help to illustrate an African re-appropriation of the biblical text. The choice of this text is motivated by the prophetic and therapeutic lessons that emerge from it. Problems concerning holistic and religious healing in all the Christian confessions in Africa and in all the African traditional religions call for the urgent therapeutic and mystical reading of biblical prophetism. The third and last argument of my book borders on the field of mystical experience of God by contemporary Africans. This point is the most original of all though it appears last. It is from the depth of the mystical experience that Africans have about the God of Jesus Christ—which cannot be the monopoly of nor can it be manipulated by any culture, be it western—that they will find the basis for the emergence of a Christianity of full life. This is a Christianity of holistic liberation from all idolatrous powers that lead postcolonial Africa and the black diaspora to death and political and spiritual decadence.

My book reposes on a tripod; three poles that are resolutely political, theological and mystical. Let us now analyse succinctly each of these poles that constitute my “hermeneutical situation”. Without retracing the stages of the argumentation of my book, I will briefly summarise the major moments while underlining the challenges and questions that persist. I will do this descriptive work together with a phenomenological exposition of my thought taking as point of departure the results of my phenomenological and mystical interpretation of the story of the journey of the prophet Elijah to the mountain of God, Horeb in I Kings 19,1-21. My presentation is in three points: the political dimension (prophetic),

the theological dimension (exegetic), and the mystical dimension (doxological) of Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

Political and Prophetic Dimension of Black African Christology of Holistic Liberation:

This section is largely inspired by the dynamic retrospective and prospective presentation of liberation theologies in Africa by the Nigerian theologian Eugene Uzukwu in his article “‘From Nobody to Somebody’, Pertinence of African Liberation Theology. Has Medellin Impact on Liberation Theology in Africa?”⁸

Borrowing from the political theologies of Jürgen Moltmann⁹ and J.B. Metz¹⁰, I underlined the political, critical and prophetic dimension of a Trinitarian theology of the cross. Faith in the Crucified God brings Christians to face “deep crisis” of their Christian identity. It obliges them to a radical conversion of their lives and to enter the movement of radical transvaluation of values provoked by the scandal of the crucified God. A theology of the cross like the one developed by Jürgen Moltmann brings out the urgency of promoting an internal critique of the church and the society in the name of the “critical and dangerous memory” of Jesus of Nazareth who was condemned as blasphemer by the religious authorities of Jerusalem and as seditious and revolutionary by the political authorities of Rome. The preaching of the Kingdom of God led Jesus to a fatal confrontation with the political and religious authorities locked up in the idolatrous cult of personality, money and power. By denouncing the hypocrisy and

⁸ Conference delivered at Milltown Institute, Dublin, during a symposium on *Theology of Liberation, Movement or Moment?*, October 4, 2008.

⁹ I find the following works of Jürgen Moltmann very useful for what follows: *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1974. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. 1st Fortress Press ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. 1st Fortress Press ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

¹⁰ See J.-B. Metz *La foi dans l'histoire et la société. Essai d'une théologie fondamentale pratique*, (Cogitatio fidei n° 99), Cerf, Paris, 1999.

idolatry of the religious and political authorities of his époque Jesus sets the poor and oppressed free from the yoke of the despots and tyrants of his époque as well as those of the present day.

For the church of the *crucified*, the preaching of the Messiah, crucified as blasphemer and seditious, must lead to a deep examination of conscience and a profound posture of conversion of her rigid and authoritarian structures to the values of the Gospel beatitudes. All through her history, the church had to face the idolatrous sin her members committed due to the neglect of the *dramatic* and *critical* character of the crucified God. The Church of Jesus Christ must avoid aligning with the powerful and the tyrants of the society who promote, at the planetary level, an idolatrous and pagan religion of money, power, social prestige, race and economic growth. If in the secularised societies of western Europe Moltmann and Metz criticize the privatisation of the Christian faith and individualism as plagues of the Christian churches, in postcolonial Africa the prophetic and iconoclastic dimension of Black African Christology of liberation consists in fighting the dictatorial and oppressive structures which present themselves to the people as “divinities” of money, blood and tribe to be worshiped as such. The fifty years of postcolonial Africa have been marked by the bloody and cleptocratic dictatorships. This is based on robbery, killing, tribalism and the idolatrous political personality cults of Africans dictators rendered by dehumanised and zombified masses. Black African Christology of holistic liberation toes the line of the acts of great prophetic and religious leaders who shed their blood for daring to confront the bloody and diabolic powers which continue to bleed African peoples mercilessly. Leaders like Nelson Mandela, Thomas Sankara, Bishop Munzihirwa, Bishop Emmanuel Kataliko, Fr. Jean-Marc Ela, Fr. Engelbert Mveng, are actors and witnesses of a political and prophetic critique of dehumanisation and immoral regimes which proliferate in postcolonial Africa and push African societies to the margins of history and away from places where the major political and economic orientations of the planet are decided.

At the moment when we are experiencing a world economic recession, it is worrying to see the absence of sub-Saharan Africa at the G20 summit on 20th April 2009 in London. Given the structural and political exclusion of postcolonial African societies and the exploitative logic that dominates the relationship the powerful western powers entertains with them, one fears an increase in the number of victims of war, famine and catastrophic management of African countries. In this moment of despair and dread, Christian churches have the mission to remind the dictators and their peoples who “worship them” that faith in the crucified God is a dangerous and scandalous memory which subjects all authorities and institutions of this world to the impartial and just paradoxical judgment of the crucified and risen God. As a religion of crisis, Christianity acts radically as a subversive memory which sets people free from idolatrous religions of power, money, race, consumption and blood in the name of the eschatological sovereignty of God whose ultimate power manifests itself in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before this God who raises the dead on the last day all the victims of slavery, diverse genocides perpetrated in the history of the world, victims of wars of colonial exploitation and of violence towards the dominated classes of our societies remain subjects who ask for justice and whose memory remains alive in the heart of God. By raising Jesus from the dead, God opens the reign of grace and justice by demonstrating his absolute sovereignty over all that exists and all that is not yet visible. This eschatological reserve sets men free from compulsive and mechanical worship of idolatrous powers which preside over the neo-liberal globalisation and generate wars, genocides, slavery, and economic recession, all sorts of physical and symbolical violence of the information technology network.

Because of its radically critical and iconoclastic dimension, Black African Christology of liberation is elaborated in proximity with the prophetic *gestures* of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus of Nazareth who accomplishes in the paschal event the Law and the Prophets. I want to insist here on the figure of Elijah

because of his paradigmatic position both in the Jewish mysticism of *Merkabah* (the throne or chariot of God, Ezk 1-3) and in Christianity. Is he not one of the prophets who together with Moses appeared during the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor? Let us briefly explore the theological resources that the emblematic figure of Elijah the Tishbite opens for the Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

Prophetic and Exegetical Dimension of Black African Christology of holistic Liberation

I cannot reproduce all the stages and results¹¹ of my exegetical and theological study of the story of the journey of the prophet Elijah to the mountain of God, Horeb in I Kings 19, 1-21. In verse 12, God appears in the paradoxical mode of the “*sound of a sheer silence*” and after three violent cosmic events in which he was not. In reality God is neither in the strong wind nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire that consumes the mountain. These three events precede the acoustic apparition of God because the “*sound of sheer silence*” invokes the domain of hearing and not that of seeing. Properly speaking, there is no theophany in this story, but the interior hearing of a “sound of sheer silence”.

The first thing I want to note is the theological intention of the story to make an absolute differentiation between the Lord and the cosmic apparitions of Baal which was worshiped as the “God of

¹¹ See my work « Une lecture négro-africaine, phénoménologique et Mystique de 1 R 19, 1-21 in my book, *Le Dieu Crucifié*, op. cit. pp. 226-289. For a Black African interpretation of the 400 years of the monarchical and dramatic history of Israel as recounted in the book of Kings, see my homage to the Spiritan exegete Fr. Pierre Buis, C.S.Sp (1929-2005) in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* under the title “Exegèse et vie missionnaire: Essai de relecture théologique et spirituelle de la vie du père Pierre Buis, C.S.Sp (18/3/1929 à Paris – 23/7/2005 à Rome). In this article, I establish a theologico-political correlation between the 4 centuries of chaotic history of monarchy in Israel (X-VI centuries) and 4 centuries of the tragic history of Africa from the 16th to the 20th century whose different features are: black slave trade, slavery, European military colonization and postcolonial diabolic dictatorship

Thunder". The fight between the Baals and YHWH constitutes the focal point of the whole cycle of Elijah; just as in the preceding chapter (1Kg 18) Elijah triumphed over and beheaded the prophets of Baal at the foot of Mount Carmel. This first remark puts us before an open question: the status of the "divinities" of the ATR (e.g. *Vodun* of Adja-Fon of Benin, *Orisha* of Yoruba of Nigeria and *Bwiti* of the Fang of Gabon) vis-à-vis the Trinitarian God of missionary Christianity. Is there properly speaking polytheism or monotheism in the aforementioned traditional religions?

I would like to refer the reader to the debate between Byang Kato and Bolaji Idowu as well as other theologians from Nigeria and Ghana who have worked on this question. It seems to me that the colonial and neo-colonial demonization of ATR and its practices by western missionaries and the implicit theology of malediction of Cham which accompanied the evangelisation of African peoples constitute pejorative factors as regards ATR. I refer also to the work on the *Vodun* of Benin from a Christian perspective by a theologian from Benin Barthelemy Adoukonou: *Jalons pour une théologie africaine: Essai d'une herméneutique chrétienne du Vodun Dahoméen*¹². In this work, Adoukonou shows the existence of a supreme God Mahou, but who is far from human affairs. But there is a plethora of *vodun* and *loa* (spirits or deities) responsible for thunder, rain, healing and who demand sacrifices from human beings who are beneficiaries of their generosity in daily affairs.

Adoukonou talks also of the "magic" ceremony for the prevention of the King's death at the beginning of the year through the sacrifice of a young child. This sacrifice is contrary to the biblical revelation as it is taught in the Torah and the prophets, as well as to the essence of Christianity in which God himself gives or sacrifices his only Son so that human beings may be saved by pure abundant grace. From this point of view I submit that the *Vodun* and other ATR must absolutely "convert" to the religion of love

¹² Vol 1 & Vol 2, Lethiellux & Culture et Vérité, Paris-Namur, 1980.

and grace which is the confession of the crucified and risen God. An adept of the *Vodun* who wants to become Christian has to shade off a lot of things and convert because Christianity is a religion of “metanoia”, the conversion of the heart.

On the other hand, I am much more at home with the position of Bimwenyi Kweshi¹³ in his book, *Discours théologique négro-africaine, problèmes des fondements*¹⁴, when he affirms that the God of ATR (*Nzambe, Mungu, Nzam...*) is identical to the Christian God. However, one has to recognize the absolute novelty of the missionary proclamation of the Gospel which is based on the Trinitarian and Christological revelation. That the God of our ancestors has a Son, who came in the “human condition” preached the Gospel of the reign of God, suffered, died and rose from the dead is a novelty conveyed by Christian revelation. My personal position consists in saying that the God of ATR is the same as that of western Christianity. However, the Trinitarian Christology constitutes a radical novelty which calls for “paradigm shift” in the African religious universe and requires the elaboration of a Black African Christology of holistic liberation. That is what I tried to demonstrate in my book, *Le Dieu crucifié en Afrique*.

The second remark about the “*sound of sheer silence*” in 1 Kg 19, 1-21 consists in showing the call to conversion that YHWH addressed to the turbulent and violent prophet Elijah the Tishbite. In fact chapter 19 is in contrast with chapter 18 where Elijah calls down fire from heaven to demonstrate the oneness of YHWH and the efficacy of the prophet’s prayer to YHWH. However, a chapter later, Elijah could no longer recognize the paradoxical presence of YHWH and asks to die in view of the total failure of his mission to bring back the Israelites to the one cult of YHWH which is the mark of the covenant with the fathers in the desert. The total absence of YHWH in the three cosmic phenomena mentioned

¹³ I gave details of the theologies of inculturation of Adokounou and Bimwenyi Kweshi in my book, *Panorama de la théologie négro-africaine contemporaine*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2002.

¹⁴ *Présence Africaine*, Paris, 1981.

above (wind, earthquake and fire) constitutes a call to “conversion” in two complementary directions. First, Elijah realises that he has no control over the freedom and sovereignty of YHWH which safeguards his absolute transcendence in the midst of his paradoxical manifestation (immanence). But, second, at the same time, the people must make a clear distinction between YHWH and the cosmic divinities of Canaan and the surrounding peoples. This paradoxical manifestation of YHWH by a “sound of sheer silence” can also constitute a call to conversion addressed to western Christianity and to all Christian churches in the world, for those occasions when they have attempted to “domesticate” and “confiscate” the dangerous memory of the crucified and risen God.

No particular culture or church can claim the monopoly of the confession and celebration of the Christian faith. It is for this intrinsically theological reason that African Christian churches must elaborate their dogmatic theology, their liturgies and healing ministries according to the spiritual and sociological demands of African peoples. We have passed the time of sterile polemics about whether or not African theologians should slavishly obtain permission from Rome and the Vatican in order to think, express and live their faith in Christ, Lord and Saviour. It is left for African theologians to mobilize all the rhythms of their theologies in order to help African peoples to worship God in Spirit and in Truth and find in their *Christian praxis* responses to their spiritual and therapeutic demands. That is why in my book, I borrowed from the Jewish mysticism of Merkabah and the Kabbalah and from the “theology of pathos” of Abraham Heschel¹⁵ in order to ground the mystical, theological and symbolic bases of Black African Christology of holistic liberation.

It is no longer necessary to show the cultural and religious specificity of ATR and afro-Christian churches centred on the practice of healing and exorcism. Contrary to western theologies marked by the historico-critical method, positivism, scepticism and

¹⁵ A. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Perennial Classics, New York, 2001, pp. 285-298.

the scienticism of western modernity, African theologies reflect the religious dimensions of African cultures and the impossibility of separating the invisible sphere of the God of the ancestors and the visible sphere of human beings and the cosmos.

We want to draw attention to a subtle imposition of western exegetical and theological methods on African Catholics churches affiliated to Rome, by a rigid and pyramidal hierarchy which sacrifices the cultural specificity of non western peoples on the altar of an imperial and canonical catholicity. To solve this grave theological and political problem, the church must become a church which listens to the aspirations, sufferings and cries of the people oppressed under the wheels of neo-liberal politics and military imperialism of western powers. This is what the Nigerian theologian Eugene Uzukwu calls *A Listening Church. Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*¹⁶. I gave an insight into Uzukwu's thought in my book, *Panorama des théologies négro-africaines anglophones*¹⁷. I endorse the critical, prophetic and courageous dimension of Uzukwu's works for the emergence of churches strongly anchored on the African cultural terrain and involved in the work of democratisation of the structures of the church and of corrupt putrefying postcolonial State.

Why hide the growing demands of religious healing in African churches in the name of western monolithic and rationalistic interpretation of the message of Jesus Christ while the Gospels are filled with scenes of healing and exorcism? Why must catholic seminarians from Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroun slavishly accept the dubious results of Bultmann's demythologization or the theological minimalism of the historico-critical method while Christians around them who frequent the independent African churches, free from Roman influence, live their faith as they search for spiritual healing, in communion with the spirit of God in order to cast out evil spirits at the origin of their sickness and social

¹⁶ Orbis Books, New York, 1996

¹⁷ Op. cit.

divisions. There is no need to restate here the urgency of Black African Christology of holistic liberation in accord with the spiritual, cultural, therapeutic and religious demands of Africans.

The arrogance of Rome, her intransigence as regards the uniform and mechanical observance of the canons of western catholicity independently of the internal cultural dynamics of each people has led to the massive departure of millions of African Catholics to found African independent churches in Africa and the Diaspora among the black Africans of Europe and North America. The schism of Bishop Milingo¹⁸ is not unrelated to this will to power of Rome and the Vatican over the so called “mission countries” as if Europe and North America were not in need of evangelisation (mission) and hence of conversion (metanoia) to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The charismatic and therapeutic concentration of ATR and African initiated churches lead me to the last part of this article which is resolutely mystical and therapeutic. My researches in the story of I kings 19, 1-21 led me to consult many works of erudite western exegetes that helped me to establish the connection between the liturgy of the Sabbath in the Essene communities of Qumran and the text of I Kings 19, 1-21. It is in the works of French exegetes, Jacques Briend¹⁹ and Pierre Buis²⁰ that I discovered the mystical significance of the paradoxical expression *sound of sheer silence* or *Qol De Mama Daqqa*. What is the connection between the scarcity of this expression in the OT and its omnipresence in the texts on Sabbath offering at Qumran? Is there a rapport between the paradoxical expression and the “celestial

¹⁸ See an analysis of the conflict between Rome and Bishop Milingo in my book : *Panorama des théologies négro-africaines anglophones*, op. cit. pp. 36-55. I think that Milingo is one of the principal representatives of prophetic and therapeutic theology of holistic liberation in postcolonial Africa. I note also the therapeutic Christology of holistic liberation in the work of the Cameroonian Jesuit, Meinrad Hebga who died in March 2008. See my book, *Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique*, pp 209-220.

¹⁹ Jacques Briend, *Dieu dans l'Ecriture*, Cerf, Paris, 1992.

²⁰ Pierre Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, J. Gabalda et Cie Editeurs, Paris, 1997.

liturgy where angels worship God without words, hence imitating the silence of God? If yes, what is the role of angels in the Jewish mysticism of *Merkabah* and in the ATR? How can a close religious connection between Jewish mysticism of Qumran and the ATR open heuristic and decisive avenues for the emergence of a Black African Christology of holistic liberation?

The Mystical and Doxological Dimension of Negro-African Christology of Holistic Liberation

The expression, “a sound of sheer silence” which appears in v.12 of I Kings 19 helps to move from the theological and exegetic dimension to the mystical and doxological dimension of Black African Christology of holistic liberation. As I noted above, Old Testament exegetes (Jacques Briend and Pierre Buis) testify to the frequency of the paradoxical expression *sound of sheer silence* in the manuscripts of Essenes of Qumran. It is a liturgical expression in the context of songs for the Sabbath holocaust in the community of Qumran. For Jacques Briend:

The expression “sound of sheer silence” is an incontestable recapture I Kings 19, 1-12 in the context of the heavenly liturgy. The description of the angelic service contains a paradox well underlined by C. Newson and D.C. Allison. The angels praise and bless God without the content of the song being given. The focus is the silence of the angels that is modelled in a way on God’s silence. Their jubilation is done without words. The interest for these songs for Sabbath holocaust goes beyond what can be said about them. These texts help to understand the place of these angels in Jewish liturgy and the development of a Jewish mysticism around the *Merkabah*,”²¹.

²¹ J. Briend, Dieu dans l’Ecriture, op. cit. p. 39.

Merkabah is the divine “throne-chariot” in Ezk 1-3 and constitutes the central pivot in the Jewish mysticism of the same name. Through an ecstatic incursion in the celestial spheres and thrones, Jewish mysticism anticipates the eschatological liturgy through its presence in synagogal liturgy of the Sabbath. Moreover, we have seen the determinant role of angels as messenger of God to the prophet Elijah in the context of 1Kg19, 1-21. This omnipresence has to be correlated with the omnipresence of spirits in ATR. I draw a connection here between angels in Jewish mysticism and spirits in the therapeutic liturgies of afro-Christian churches and the ATR. This analogy is determinant in the sense that in the two contexts (Jewish and Black African) divine healing constitutes the central aspect of the liturgy. Although one must reject in strong terms fundamentalist deviations, authoritarian impostors and all sorts of mental manipulations found in the therapeutic practices of ATR and the African initiated churches, it is important to underline healing as a characteristic proper to ATR. It resists fiercely the technological, ideological and nihilistic uniformization which is produced by the planetary display of the scientific and consumerist religion of neo-liberal globalisation. The multiplication of spontaneous syncretism by Africans between western Christianity and the spiritual elements of ATR constitute the basis of a Christianity rooted in the mystical genus of African cultures.

While churches are emptying in Europe and North America, while Christianity is being attacked politically and in the media by anti-Christian lobbies(of the Anti-Christ) in technologically advanced societies, while big segments of western societies lose the memory of Christian faith in favour of the acceleration of the process of de-Christianisation and secularisation, it is important to note the charismatic and therapeutic effervescence of churches in Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa which become de facto the most dynamic and numerous churches of the 21st Century. This sensitive transfer of the centre of gravity of Christianity from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere constitutes a

decisive reality with extraordinary theological and political consequences. For the first time in its global expansion, the gospel of the Crucified and Risen God is no longer the monopoly of western civilisation of Greco-Latin origin, but has been totally transformed by the people of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Concerning African Christian theology, I am convinced that an in-depth exploration of Jewish mysticism and an African appropriation of the whole Bible (with particular attention to the cultural, religious and symbolical universe of the Hebrews in the OT which starts in Africa with Moses) constitute the major pivots capable of dis-alienating us from mental, scholastic and ideological schemes of Greco-Latin culture in which Africa received the Good news of Jesus Christ. In my book, *Le Dieu Crucifié en Afrique*, I tried to draw inspiration from rabbinic, prophetic and pathos-filled theology of Jewish mystics (A. Heschel, G. Scholem, I. Louria) in order to elaborate a Christology of holistic liberation in which ecstatic contemplation of the “throne-chariot of God” (the Merkabah) helps the contemplative and the praying faithful to be irradiated by divine energies coming out from the celestial court through the angels who mysteriously mediate between the two worlds that are closely connected in the global world vision of ATR.

This reality is very important for the “necessary dialogue” that must be carried out between African churches and western churches outside the primitive biases of colonial and neo-colonial ethnography, which support the works of some western africanist theologians. This Black African and centrist appropriation of the Bible is massively promoted by Afro-American theologians²² of liberation (Cone, Wright, Hopkins) for whom a mystical and cultural return to Africa constitutes a primordial axis in the process

²² See my book, *Panorama des théologies négro-africaines anglophones*, op. cit. For a global vision of Black Churches in the multicultural and multi racial America, see Iva E. Caruthers, Frederick D. Haynes III, and Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., (Eds), *Blow the Trumpet in Zion. Global Vision and Action for the 21st Century Black Church*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

of their dis-alienation and their holistic liberation from the epistemological schema of the dominant white and Eurocentric theology. This Afrocentric appropriation of the Bible is a visceral characteristic of Black theologies of liberation produced by the black churches of USA:

...it is no less true that American black people have a tradition of their own that stretches back to Africa and its traditional religions. We are an *African* people, at least to the degree that our grandparents came from Africa and not from Europe. They brought with them their stories and combined them with the Christian story, thereby creating a black religious tradition unique to North America. African culture informed black people's perspective on Christianity and made it impossible for many slaves to accept an interpretation of the Jesus story that violated their will for freedom. The passive Christ of white Christianity when combined with African culture became the Liberator of the oppressed from socio-political oppression.²³

The terrain of spiritual, religious and mystical return to traditional Africa federates theologians from Africa and the Diaspora in Europe, America and the Caribbean against the epistemological uniformization and domination of conservative theologies of European and American churches which have proved to be incapable to denounce and fight against oppressive systems that support the contemporary American society.

It is here that one must recognize and praise the vitality of festive and enthusiastic liturgies of African churches, all denominations, which express fundamentally the doxological and mystical orientations of ATR. If God is continuously worshiped by Africans and constitutes their first recourse independently of their

²³ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997.104-105.

religions and beliefs, it is because of the strong mystical foundation of ATR. At the moment when we are witnessing the closure of Christian churches in secularized, nihilistic and atheistic Western Europe and North America, one must recognize the charismatic and therapeutic effervescence of black African societies. Although one must be careful about the deviations, simony, charlatanism, dupery and mental manipulations in some of the independent churches, it is important to underline the therapeutic specificity of these churches vis-à-vis churches in Europe and North America.

Exegetical studies on the omnipresence of the expression “Sound of sheer silence” in the manuscripts of Qumran show a connection between the celestial liturgy and the eschatological liturgy in the celestial court where angels worship without words, hence through the “sound of sheer silence”. This mysterious articulation between the divine transcendence (heavenly liturgy) and his immanence in the world (terrestrial liturgy) show the strong resistance that ATR presents against atheistic and materialistic currents being diffused in the world through new technologies of the consumerist and mediated religion. The agony and gradual disappearance of ecclesial institutions and Christian memory in European and American societies must be seen by Africans as a permanent challenge and a theological provocation that call for an elaboration of a Christianity of the 21st Century on the basis of prophetic, therapeutic and critical theologies of holistic liberation. Without a strong and lively mystical basis, no theology can give birth to a Christianity of life, of divine compassion and of holistic liberation of human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

[Translated from French by Bede Ukwuije c.s.sp. (SIST, Attakwu Enugu)]

**Trinity in Contemporary African Theology – Conversation
with Augustine Ramazanni, Bede Ukuije, and Benoît Kungua**

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Stating the Problem—Repositioning God on the Driving Seat of
African Theology:

African theology has come a long way. Second and third generation sub-Saharan African Christians may not be as preoccupied with issues of identity that dominated African theology in the 1950s. They live the postcolonial reality. It is a long way from the seminal *Des Prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (Black Priests Wonder) of 1956. Leading young African theologians today are concerned more about the wholesome appropriation of the historical self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ than questions of identity. They perceive the appropriation of this self-communication and self-gift of God in Jesus Christ as the necessary channel to fully humanize and integrally liberate all Africans and all humans! Therefore a self-defensive or apologetic cultural account/affirmation of one's humanity provoked by experiences such as slavery, racism, dehumanization, lynching, colonization, globalization, and hosts of other evils that trail Africa's unhappy memory should no longer constitute the starting point of knowing and practicing the faith in the God revealed by Jesus Christ. Theological reflection on the faith should be guided by the insight of Lutheran theologian Karl Barth. He insisted, against Schleiermacher and other protagonists of liberal theology, that theology must be concerned with its object, "the Word of God" addressed to humans. Only God tells humans who God is. Appropriating this Word creates, renews or transforms humans, and facilitates the emergence of the community called Church. Therefore, contemporary African theologians should set aside self-

defensive aggressive apologetics that was the stock-in-trade of pioneer African theologians.

On the other hand, this emerging option should in no way be construed as belittling the historical importance of context or the relevance of giving an account of the humanity of Africans denied by others. At times, in the past, for African theologians, this account amounted to hurling back on colonial anthropology and missionary rhetoric responses crafted in terms similar to those used in abusing the humanity of Africans: "How can the untutored African conceive God ... How can this be? ... Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing" (Emil Ludwig). Mbiti responded, "Western missionaries did not introduce God to Africa – rather, it was God who brought them to Africa, as carriers of news about Jesus Christ." Is such defensive or apologetic approach a betrayal of Christian theology, as some young African theologians claim? Is this a case of taking the eye off the theological task? Indeed, is Okot p'Bitek's characterization of African theologians, John Mbiti in particular, as "hellenizers" of African Traditional Religion (ATR), defensible? Is Ifi Amadiume's claim that the Nigerian (Igbo) theologians' naming of God, reduced to "the single truth of a supreme male God" for promoting an ideological continuity between ATR and Christianity, accurate? Have theologians totally abandoned African "traditional pluralism" (Amadiume)? Are pioneers really uncritical because they describe God in ATR and Christianity as "Supreme Being" (adopting the language of anthropologists or theorists of religion), or are they simply using ready to hand models to discuss God experienced in African communities? Is their "resistance polemics", i.e. self-defensive apologetics, developed in the heat of conflict¹ justifiable

¹ Amadiume calls "resistance polemics" *Nzagwalu*, Igbo for "answering back": with the "devastating power of the 'mouth' or the hard-hitting accuracy of the 'pen'". She finds this useful in critical polemics. It is similar to what in African literature is called *Bolekaja*, Yoruba for "come down, let's fight", associated with touts at the motor park. Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (London & New York: Zed Books, 1997). 61-64. See

and understandable from their historical perspective? The above orienting questions help us to evaluate the radical challenge new generation African theologians pose to theology in Africa.

In exploring the attempt to reposition God on the driving seat of African theology one notes that ATR and its culture are transmitters of identity. The faith community and theologians are aware of this. The late Kwame Bediako, an evangelical theologian, defended the positive role of apologetics: the "integrity of conversion" requires "a unity of self in which one's past is genuinely integrated into present commitment".² Also Catholic philosopher-theologian, Eboussi-Boulaga, says the same thing: "A living community's past cannot be contradistinguished from its present as 'true' or 'false'. What has given one's ancestors reasons for living and dying cannot simply be repudiated as absurd and senseless by one who finds oneself in human continuity with them".³ These two theologians are not soft on inculturation and indigenization rhetoric; rather they sharply take them to task. Are they also hellenizers of Christianity? I do not think that they are diverted from the theological task because they raise questions of self-identity or apologetics.

Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), p.xiv. For John Mbiti's view on God in ATR see John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 11. For the critique of African theologians by Amadiume and p'Bitek, see See Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: 1971). Ifi Amadiume, "Igbo and African Religious Perspectives on Religious Conscience and the Global Economy," in *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, ed. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis - in association with Boston Research Centre for the 21st Century, 2002).

² Kwame Bediako, "How Is Jesus Christ Lord? - Aspects of an Evangelical Christian Apologetics in the Context of African Religious Pluralism," *Exchange* 25, no. 1 (1996).

³ F. Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes : An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), p.4.

Introducing Ukwuije, Ramazani and Kungua:

The three young African theologians-philosophers I am going to open a conversation with understand the task or business of theology as centred on its object. Theology is concerned with theological issues and not with defensive apologetics, nor with sociology or anthropology. Nevertheless, the pre-comprehension of their theology is the African context. Following Karl Barth, they all insist that theology's object is the Word of God addressed by God to humans in the historical revelation of the Crucified Jesus Christ! All three theologians are Catholic, trained in French universities and wrote in French. The fundamental evangelical inspiration and even starting point of their theology testify to the ecumenical perspective of new generation African theologians.

Bede Ukwuije studied at the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris) and published his thesis with the title *Trinité et Inculturation*.⁴ Instead of an anthropological or apologetic starting point, Ukwuije proposes a theological approach to the theology of God; God that is historically revealed in Jesus Christ and that identifies God's self with the Crucified Jesus. He discovers in evangelical theologian, Eberhard Jüngel, a rich methodology for inculturation. The way Jüngel confronted secularization and atheism in the West, to account for the faith, is theological rather than philosophical-apologetic. Jüngel does not belittle philosophy (influence by Hegel), rather philosophy functions as instrument in the God-talk. God-talk is fundamentally determined by and faithful to the experience of the Crucified (incarnate) Son of God; God that is One and Three. Anthropology, the doctrine of the human person, flows from this: faith in the Crucified God justifies, gives identity to the human person. Ukwuije considers this the viable pathway to transform Africans by helping them correctly say God in Jesus Christ. He sees the project

⁴ Bede Ukwuije, *Trinité Et Inculturation*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Henri-Jérôme Gagey, *Théologie À L'université* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008).

of theology in his African constituency as converting Africans to the God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, rather than trying to persuade Africans to become Christian by elaborating a discourse of the continuity between the God of ATR and the God of Jesus Christ.

Augustin Ramazani Bishwende studied theology at the University of Strasbourg. He published his thesis in two volumes: *Pour une Ecclésiologie Trinitaire dans la Postmodernité et la Mondialisation*⁵ He argues that the crisis in the modern world that is related to the crisis of the Western church can only be effectively addressed theologically with a Trinitarian image of the church: a church that embodies the transforming imprint of the One God in Three Persons. God's own life as God (immanent) and God as revealed in the Crucified and Risen Jesus (economic) create the Church-event with radical consequences. The relational and communal dimension of God's self as communicated through Jesus Christ engenders communion, sharing, dialogue, and respect for cultures in the postmodern world that is determined by globalization. Vatican II opened the possibility of renewal for the Church to enable the church mediate a turnaround of the world of globalization. From Vatican II the Church embraced a Trinitarian ecclesiology that differs from the institutional, monarchical, and societal Church model that shaped and dominated Church life in the world after the Council of Trent: this institutional model peaked in excessive centralization and intolerance of Vatican I. Ramazani's passion is to explore historical developments and propose a new "reception" of Vatican II to radically apply in church and world the relational and communal Trinitarian image of the Church that is non-hierarchical. This Church model determined by the Triune God revealed in the Crucified-Risen Jesus Christ

⁵ Augustin Ramazani Bishwende, *Pour Une Ecclésiologie Trinitaire Dans La Postmodernité Et La Mondialisation* - vol. I: De R. Bellarmin à Y. Congar (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008). Augustin Ramazani Bishwende, *Pour Une Ecclésiologie Trinitaire Dans La Postmodernité Et La Mondialisation*, vol. 2: De la Déconstruction à la Réception de Vatican II (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

displays radical communion and relationship that is non-hierarchical. It displays a church where in the Holy Spirit and nourished by Eucharistic communion universal and particular/local are coextensive.

Finally, Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua studied philosophy at the University of Paris IV – Sorbonne, and theology at the University Marc Bloch, Strasbourg. His focus is to develop a holistic image of the God Crucified in Jesus Christ for the integral liberation of Africans. He readily appropriates the positive energies of African liberation theology and political theory represented especially by Engelbert Mveng, Jean-Marc Ela, Kä Mana, and Archille Mbembe. In analysing the Christian revelation of the One God in the Crucified and Risen Jesus, he espouses the viewpoint of his fellow national, Congolese theologian Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi, by affirming identity, though with radical difference, between God in ATR and God revealed in Jesus Christ. He rejects a naïve approach to African identity, critically analyses the causes of the malaise of Africans and African countries, and indexes their internal and external causes (he elaborates a critical narrative, suffused with Congolese rhetorical verve in which he denounced in no uncertain terms, the corrupt Mobutu era in Zaire and the present dictatorial regimes in Africa like the dictatorship of Biya in Cameroon). Western philosophers and communication theorists that radically critiqued one-dimensional Western modernity (especially Martin Heidegger, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas) inspired Kungua's critique of globalisation's impact on Africa. But he embeds his analysis of Trinitarian liberation on the evangelical political theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Catholic political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. These gave him the language to explore the self communication of God in the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ for integral liberation of humans and Africans. They provide him with the tools of rhetorically challenging globalisation through the dangerous remembering of the Crucified and the critical narrative of the vanquished. Finally, he also draws from the wealth of Jewish mysticism to anchor his

theology of holistic liberation or inculturation-liberation within his African constituency. The recourse to mysticism enables him address critically and positively the mystical and therapeutic contribution of African initiated churches and charismatic prayer movements of the mainline missionary churches.

Ukwuije and Kungua have each published a digest of their books in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*. Ramazani is being introduced, for the first time, to readers of the Bulletin through this review. However, they all share the same concern—the priority of the One Triune God revealed through the Crucified and Risen Jesus as focus of theology. Ukwuije and Kungua clearly show that Africa is their constituency. On the other hand, Ramazani, Congolese by origin, uses France and the Western Church as point of departure and arrival to discuss Trinitarian ecclesiology. The ease with which the three argue from and recognise the vitality of evangelical theology, catholic theology, and, to a lesser degree, Orthodox theology, speak to the emerging concern of the new generation African theologians – the ecumenical imperative of Christian life and theology. My evaluation is from three perspectives: the limits of apologetics, the priority of the object of theology, and the need to revisit the constituency of the theologian.

Distancing Theology from Apologetics:

The apologetic approach, as starting point of theology, is clearly rejected by Ukwuije and Ramazani, and to a lesser degree by Kungua. It is my view that what they reject is negative apologetics. The question-raising and context-specific function of apologetics is inescapable in their theology, and in any theology! “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Ramazani’s two volumes have the design of moving away from negative polemical and defensive apologetics that generate an insulated church; a church that lays high premium on visibility—as true incarnation of Christ in the world, it is the visible Body of

Christ and a perfect society under the Vicar of Christ, the Pope. Despite the effort of Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) to root the Church radically within the Christ and the God that is Three in One, Ramazani correctly notes that the limited historical preoccupation with the societal model of a church, with a very strong accent on visibility, bottled Bellarmine within the scholastic apologetic, defensive and condemnatory procedure. The terminus of the impact of Robert Bellarmine's model of the Church, focused on the Christ – incarnating the Christ in the world – is the Vatican I institutional, hierarchical, and monarchical Church. Vatican II and post-Vatican II ecclesiology were unsuccessful in the effort to transcend the societal or institutional image of the Church. In his two volumes Ramazani proposes to deconstruct models and reinvent the church through a new “reception” of Vatican II. This new reception is rooted in the recovery of the patristic, ecumenical and biblical image of the church that is Trinitarian. To realise his objective Ramazani espouses a positive historical-critical reading of Scripture and Christian (Patristic) sources pursued by theologians such as Moehler, Newman and Congar. Their approach, he notes, is constructive apologetics that meditates on the mystery of God and elaborates a theology of the church founded on the object of theology (I: 102-103). Karl Barth defines this object as the Word of God addressed to humans for their conversion; the church-event results from the reaction to the Word proclaimed. Ramazani's approach is historical. He stresses that as Robert Bellarmine represents the Church model that he finds unhelpful (volume I), Yves Congar is the theologian of the emergent Church that debuts at Vatican II. The illustration of emergent Trinitarian ecclesiology, based on relationship and communion, is the adoption of Inculturation, dialogue and ‘contexturation’ inform the Church of the future rooted in the Trinity. By ‘contexturation’ Ramazani understands a Trinitarian approach that radically transforms the structures of the Church to make it more resilient to change the globalised world. Vatican II enabled cultural transformation in the church but totally ignored the transformation of structures. (I: 93-

95) Ramazani's focus is on ecclesiology. But his search for the theological foundations led him to discuss at length historical developments of Trinitarian theology. Ukwuije and Kungua on their part not only discuss the foundations of the developments in Trinitarian theology. They also explored the radical consequences, for life in the Church and the world, of a recapture and renewal of theology based on the Trinity. Methodologically all three assume that theology must never take its eye off its object.

In light of the focus on the object of theology, we explore the very difficult questions Ukwuije asks about how to and how not to name God in Christianity practiced in Africa and the world. His consummate passion is to persuade contemporary African theologians to change focus. Theology in Africa has no more business with continuity between ATR and Christianity; the "supreme being" rhetoric should be denied airtime because it takes the eye off the task of theology (God and Christ). Pioneer African theologians adopted the language or terms of their teachers and detractors to name God. They engaged in this without critical distance and without the imperative attentiveness to the dogmatic responsibility of all theology: the death of Jesus the Son of God as the Death of God on the Cross. This totally novel image of God escaped pioneer African theologians. They were dependent on the 19th century Catholic natural theology and liberal protestant theology; they affirmed identity between the ATR God, called the "Supreme Being" (a concept developed by deist philosophers and co-opted by anthropologists), and the God of Jesus Christ. For Ukwuije this is totally unacceptable. Accepting the "supreme being" as ATR God and establishing identity between the ATR God and the God of Jesus Christ are neither good for Christian theology nor attentive to the uniqueness of ATR. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo, for example, bought into the apologetic rhetoric for reasons of identity.

Ukwuije's focus is a new method in theology. One agrees with him that Mbiti and Idowu practiced defensive apologetics. But it is important to state that it is apologetics with justifiable arguments, despite the many pitfalls. Their methodology,

dependent on the social sciences, needed updating; it was unable to free them from the pessimism or feeling of loss which characterized African literature of their time (Chinua Achebe whose methodology Ukwuije approves is master of this pessimism as aesthetic). I think their contribution can be received as a necessary introduction, a prolegomenon or pre-comprehension to the Christian theology of God. Their greatest weakness, again not uncommon among researchers of the time, is inattention to ethnographic detail that projects plurality in deity rather than one Supreme Deity. Their interest in affirming continuity between the God of ATR and the monotheistic Western Christian God revealed in Jesus Christ is an attempt to Christianize a pre-Christian religious heritage and language. Ukwuije of course does not ignore the contribution of the pioneers. In his dialogue with them, he shows a pattern of critical “reception” or radical distancing that characterises new generation African theologians.

Ukwuije’s procedure is defensible and falls within Chinua Achebe’s mantra of always searching for “a second viewpoint”. However, I think the demands he makes on theologians like Bénézet Bujo, Bmwenyi-Kweshi and Eboussi-Boulaga are exaggerated. By this critical remark I also distance myself from the exaggerations of radical evangelical theology. He commends Bujo for abandoning the language of continuity; for insisting that God, experienced in Africa, has become better known as Triune thanks to the Crucified and Risen Christ; for carefully noting that the experience of the Christ shatters and transforms the ancestral African experience. However, Ukwuije claims that Bujo’s theology is still boxed within an irredeemable un-theological corner because Bujo’s apologetic or self-defensive approach prevents him from clearly rejecting ATR monotheistic “supreme being”, an African “supreme being” that appears to be prerequisite to demonstrate the novelty of the Christian trinity (p. 173). First, there is little doubt that Ukwuije has clearly shown the historical origin of the term “Supreme Being” (from deists, later co-opted by evolutionist anthropologists). But one must note that African theologians who

use the term (Mbiti and Idowu in particular) moved it away from purely philosophical reasoning (which Africans were alleged to be incapable of) to the ethnographic terrain where historically identifiable and living deities, Chukwu, Olodumare, Nzambe, and so on, are called "supreme being". Pace Alexis Kagamé, who would object, on grounds of linguistic analysis, that naming Nzambe of the Bantu "supreme being" is heretical; compromising the singularity of Nzambe—never (analogically) to be considered a "being" among other "beings". Second, Samuel Kibicho, Kenyan theologian and great defender of autonomy and redemptive power of ATR, draws attention to the "simple monotheism" found among Eastern and Central African peoples who do not have the highly developed nature deities that are very common in West Africa.⁶ There is a way one can legitimately talk about monotheism, while at the same time paying full attention to ethnographic detail. Finally, Bible translation into African languages not only appropriated African "concepts of God" (Mbiti) but also stamped with its authority the value of African worldview in the reception of the God radically revealed in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. There is a way one can justifiably talk about continuity between ATR and its culture and Christianity, and being sensitive to the history of the Bible in Africa. I think it perilous to the project of local theology to deny the creative potential embedded in the African memory brought into the reception and appropriation of God's self-communication in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. The Fathers of the Church, from Justin Martyr to Saint Augustine, did exactly that. Adolphe Gesché applauds this Patristic wisdom as the genius of Catholicism that evangelicalism totally rejects. The history of Christian thought displayed the preservation of the

⁶ See Samuel J. Kibicho, "The Interaction of the Traditional Kikuyu Concept of God with the Biblical Concept," *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* 2 (1968), p. 215. Alexis Kagamé, *La Philosophie Bantu Comparée* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976). P.151. Kagamé, *La Philosophie Bantu Comparée*, Alexis Kagamé, "La Place De Dieu Et De L'homme Dans La Religion Des Bantu," *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* 2 (1968), Kibicho, "The Interaction of the Traditional Kikuyu Concept of God with the Biblical Concept."

“pagan heritage”. In the West, the “pagan heritage” (“the paganness” of their ancestral tradition) “remained the Christian heritage so as not to be lost to humanity.”⁷

In the above critical remarks I take on Ukwuije because of the important points he is proposing on method in theology. Ukwuije is not only a brilliant narrator and commentator. He is also a critical reviewer of relevant literature; he goes to the heart of the matter, and clearly shows no compromises with anyone who departs from the thesis that is his consuming passion: the dogmatic responsibility of all theology – this ensures the intimate link between God and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself. He admires the insight of Bimwenyi-Kweshi (perhaps the best known proponent of foundations in African theology). Bimwenyi’s severance from the metaphysical assumptions of pioneer African theologians, thanks to Heidegger and the philosophy of language, made him dump the “supreme being” rhetoric. Ukwuije applauds. However, Bimwenyi’s insistence on the openness of the African human to accessing God, his clear option for continuity between ATR and Christian revelation disqualifies his theology; he lost focus on God and the Christ of God. Ukwuije clearly prefers radical displacement, an evangelical inclination that he feels is best expressed the theology of Jüngel. Again Ukwuije admires Eboussi-Boulaga who never minced his words over the fetishism of both traditional theology, traditional Christian dogmatic definitions and African theology of inculturation—ancestral Christology and the notion of Supreme Being. Eboussi shares the pluralist option of literary icons, Achebe and Soyinka. Yet Eboussi’s christic model presents Christ as exemplar, as cosmic hero; his insistence that theology can only be negative, as God is unknowable and accessible only in metaphors, rightly made Ukwuije suspicious of his epistemological assumptions. Eboussi cannot relate his claims to the practice of a faith community that confesses the Crucified

⁷ See Adolphe Gesché, “Le Christianisme Comme Athéisme Suspensif - Réflexions Sur Le ‘Etsi Deus Non Daretur’,” *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 33 (2002). pp. 206-207.

God in Jesus Christ; such communities do not consider the Trinity as metaphor. This naturally leads Ukwuije to Jüngel, and through Jüngel to explore the epistemological assumptions not only of African theology but of all theology. I admire Ukwuije, but I like to maintain my distance; I do not think that the dogmatic responsibility of theology is irremediably compromised by acknowledging God revealed in Jesus Christ at work in ATR and the culture it transmits.⁸

Kungua is less evangelical and therefore would not always be happy in company of Ukwuije. Kungua applauds Eboussi's radical analysis of the human (African) crisis and his iconoclastic and prophetic stance with regard to Western and African theologians-philosophers. He applauds Eboussi's search for the christic principle, before-beyond Christian dogmas, to embed radical holistic liberation. He also applauds Bimwenyi's analysis and his epistemological assumptions. If anything he repeats, sings the praise of these, and carries forward in more radical rhetoric the application of the consequences of their philosophy and theology to the liberation of oppressed Africans and all oppressed. Ukwuije, while carefully but critically analysing these authors, takes leave of them because they are not sufficiently evangelical: they make philosophical assumptions or ATR and its culture the takeoff point or equal point of departure for theology; these according to Ukwuije either run the risk or are clearly ignorant of the dogmatic responsibility of theology—whose starting point is the Cross of Jesus that God totally identifies with and that is the beginning of a new image of humans. Though not as evangelical as Ukwuije, Kungua would back theology that embody the radical prophetic destruction of the Baals (Elijah cycle) of ATR. He would agree with Ukwuije that Christian theology in Africa must clearly show that it is not simply the prolongation of ATR. Theology will always train its eye on its object to ensure radical and holistic liberation in our globalised world.

⁸ I explored this in my forthcoming book, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West Africa Style*.

Theology focused on its Object:

Our three authors underline their dependence on evangelical theology whose insistence on the absolute uniqueness and incomparability of the Word of God addressed to humans is well known. All three consider Karl Barth as starting point, but take their different directions in view of the consummate passion of their theology: Ukwuije develops this by exploring the theology of Jüngel, Kungua navigates through Moltmann and Metz. Ramazani's work contains the most detailed systematic and historical narrative of developments in the theology of God that is foundational to the new Trinitarian theology of the Church. He skates carefully the historical moments of the development of the theological positions that led to Vatican II and beyond: beyond Bellarmine, beyond church that is visible in its hierarchical communion, developing the image of People of God related to Israel and arriving at church as Body of Christ rooted in the Spirit and the Trinity. Only a Trinitarian focus will be faithful to the Bible and will be able to draw all the People of God into the one sheepfold. It disarms the suspicion of the Orthodox Church and the Protestants and move ecumenism forward. The church-event is embedded in the Trinity; theology begins with God's unique self-communication that is Trinitarian. He begins with Barth who founds theology on the word of God, but does not develop a theology of the Holy Spirit. The dimension of the Holy Spirit—dear to Orthodox theology—will constitute part of his moulding blocks for suggesting a Eucharistic ecclesiology founded on the revelation of God that is One and Three.

Ramazani brilliantly tries to tie together the best of Western catholic and evangelical resources that informed the emergence of Trinitarian theology and Trinitarian ecclesiology. The problem of his work is overkill: overdose of literature review, perhaps not to omit anything, perhaps to satisfy the demands of the academy! One would have wished he limited the literature review to volume 1 and get on with the job of designing Trinitarian ecclesiology beyond

Vatican II. Nonetheless he has good grasp of the literature. In the 1st 100 pages of volume 1 he explores the Word of God as starting point of theology following Karl Barth. Then he adopts Karl Rahner's language and analysis of God's self-communication, the substance of which is the trinity! Rahner's powerful axiom, "the immanent trinity is the economic trinity and vice versa", echoes like a mantra throughout the work. However, Rahner's focus on the incarnation of the Logos and does not say enough of the Cross, the impact of the Trinity for us, and the radical challenge of Trinitarian theology to the globalised world that Ramazani is committed to. Therefore, Ramazani moves to the left of Rahner to adopt the centrality of the Cross in the Christian experience of the trinity. His theologian on the left is Jürgen Moltmann for whom the Cross is the critical point of the experience of the Trinity for us: God is revealed on the Cross of Jesus as the Crucified and Risen God for us. Therefore, the immanent and economic Trinity is revealed for us on the Cross. God as God, from all eternity, is implicated in human history. This side of Moltmann's theology, the image of the Crucified God, is also central to Kungwa's work. The humanity of God that Eberhard Jüngel develops, and that Ukwuije embraces as providing the methodological starting point for a renewed African theology of inculturation, approves of Moltmann. But Ramazani is not done with the choices presented by Western theology. In the historical narrative of the developments of Trinitarian theology in the West, he notes the dissatisfaction of Hans Urs von Balthasar with both Rahner and Moltmann. Rahner's logos theology does not account for the centrality of the Cross and tends towards modalism; while Moltmann's insight that on the Cross the immanent and economic Trinity become manifest, and that the Trinity from all eternity is involved in human history smacks of pantheism. Is there no distance between God and human history? Consequently, Ramazani moves to the right of Moltmann and espouses Balthasar's position in order to separate the immanent trinity (God as God is) from the economic Trinity. God is Love. God's internal self-emptying as Love caused and is foundational for the self-emptying on the Cross. God as God is not determined by the

historical action of God for us that peaked in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. In the careful adaptation and reworking of Rahner and Moltmann, Balthasar provides for Ramazani a new working Trinitarian principle: the soteriological Trinity is the expression of the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the fundament of the soteriological Trinity.

It is noteworthy that though Ukwuije and Kungua mention Balthasar, none of them adopt his new Trinitarian principle as working axiom as Ramazani. From the vantage point of the corrective introduced by Balthasar, Ramazani, picks the strings of his numerous sources to argue for a new ecumenical reception of Vatican II that entrenches the radical notion of the church as communion (*koinonia*), imaged and energized by intra-Trinitarian communion (that Greeks call *perichoresis*) that is non-hierarchical.

The Relevance of Constituency in African theology:

For the three new generation African theologians, the constituency of theology is understood in different ways. Ukwuije clearly represents the emerging radical evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa: the dogmatic responsibility of theology is non-negotiable anywhere, any time. But Ukwuije's constituency is still Africa, and that is why he lays emphasis on inculturation, but it is inculturation on a new key. One cannot accuse Ukwuije of rejecting local theology as another Nigerian theologian, Bryan Kato, did many years ago.

Ramzani on the other hand represents "forward church". It is surprising however that in the two volumes he avoids discussing Africa, and prefers to focus on the crisis of the Western modernity, globalisation, and the Church especially of France. The strength of his argument, based on ecumenical resources, taking care of the suspicions and fears of the Orthodox and Protestant churches, is that his proposed church model can be applied to any part of the world church. His presentation of the debate over local-universal

that pitted Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper on opposing theological camps illustrates how the church should move forward. It is clear that he favours the position of Kasper: against Ratzinger Pentecost did not ontologically and chronologically establish universal church anterior to the local (II: 60-76, 217-230, 241-257). The church gathered around the apostles in Jerusalem is simultaneously universal-particular. Drawing from Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology, Ramazani could therefore conclude, convincingly, that the church structurally transformed by Trinitarian communion, “forward church”, the church of the future is defined as Eucharistic assembly of the baptised in the Holy Spirit, gathered around its bishop to praise the Trinity. This church is local-universal simultaneously and is made competent to transform the globalised world having had its structures radically patterned on the Trinitarian communion.

Kungua, more than his two colleagues, puts constituency on a high pedestal. His passion is the reinvention of Christianity in Africa based on a radical Christology—the revelation of God Crucified on the Cross of Jesus. It is from this perspective that the memory of the weak of the word and the narrative of the oppressed become dangerous memory and healing narrative. Kungua plunged into Jewish mysticism to evoke and analyse the image of God revealed in the Elijah cycle of narratives. The revelation of God in the audible “sound of sheer silence” instead of vision argues for a mystical encounter. This is the interpretation Jewish Kabbalah gives to Elijah’s experience at Horeb: 1Kg 19; as an experience that healed the prophet of despair and fear, it confirms his war against Baals as Yahweh’s war. Kungua sees this as dramatized in Jesus who continued healing and exorcising evil spirits; and in the charismatic churches popular in African Christianity who live in praise and practice exorcism. Kungua cautions that their exaggerations should be noted, but that this should not lead to outright rejection.

African theology has indeed come a long way. It is refreshing to read these three new generation African theologians. The pity is that they are not accessible in English. Reading them convinced me

that the age-old debate on God in African religion and theology, the questions about the relevance of ATR and its cultures to Christian life and theology are not only relevant, but they have been raised to a new key. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are part and parcel of the globalised world; they practice Christianity that has moved its centre to the southern hemisphere. Our authors show that the local can be brought into constructive dialogue with the global for the transformation of the African. But they all insist (and who will disagree?) that it is the God revealed as Triune in the Crucified and Risen Jesus who addresses the therapeutic word that redefines the African, in the event that is the Spirit-filled Church, for the transformation of the world.

“Blaming the Gods: Religious Propaganda in the Nigeria-Biafra War”¹

By

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Abstract

In the Bible, as in many classical books, the vicissitudes of war and peace are often attributed to divine intervention.² In other words, religion is not new to conflicts, and vice versa, as more wars have been fought and more blood shed in the name of religion than for any other reason. Because of the complex nature of the causes of the Nigerian civil war, the precise role of religion has remained a hotly disputed proposition. The overarching attention given to both asserting and disproving the charge that the conflict had religious undertones has emerged as one of the puzzles of the civil war given all the evidence to the contrary.

This paper reflects on the religious ramifications of the civil war, especially as these portray a willingness to use religion as a propaganda tool. In doing this, it seeks to understand the vagaries of the conflict which insisted on emphasising the North-South religious dichotomy despite the involvement of the Southern Christians in the effort to safeguard Nigerian unity.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 9th SIST Missiological Symposium on ‘Sharia in a Multi-Religious Nigerian Society,’ 22 - 24 March, 2001. Funding for the research was provided by German Caritas in 1996.

² For more details on the religious dimension of armed conflicts, see Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds. *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

The Exploitation of the North-South Religious Divide

The origin of the intense religious debate in present day Nigeria, especially the controversial introduction of the Islamic Sharia code of law, can be traced to the Nigerian civil war. As long as the various regions of the federation were granted considerable autonomy in pursuit of their religious, political and social aspirations, there was a near absence of religious intolerance and controversies in Nigeria. Not even the celebrated Islamic proselytization crusades of the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, led him to change the religious status quo of the Northern Region. All that changed following the January coup of 1966, the pogroms, the forceful dissolution of the regional system, and the ensuing armed conflict. Thenceforth, deliberate and irresponsible attempts were made to give the conflict a religious colouration. The handy terms "Moslem North" and "Christian East" began to make their way into press and radio. While some Northern leaders set out to appeal to Islam's military traditions and spoke of a Holy war against the East, Biafran leaders eagerly took the bait and urged the Christians to fight in defence of their religion.

The parameters of Nigeria's unending capacity for schism have their roots in the country's colonial past. On the religious level, the *divide et impera* policy of British imperialism found expression in indirect rule in the North and direct rule in the South. While the one-hundred-year old theocracy established in the Sokoto Caliphate was allowed an uninterrupted existence after Lugard's conquest in 1903, the pre-colonial political, social and religious institutions in the South were forcibly dismantled. While Christian education and evangelism were promoted in the South, they were restricted, and in part prohibited, in the Moslem North.³ While Colonial administrators in the North did not hide their

³ For a fuller account of the prohibition of Christian evangelism in the Emirates, see Nicholas Omenka, "The Mission Enterprise and the Scramble for Africa: With Special Reference to Nigeria," *Tarikh*, New Series, vol. 2, no. 2 (2005): 1-18.

obsessive dislike of Western and missionary educated Southerners, those in the South joined the missionaries in warning about the evils of Islam. Consequently, “two opposing and extreme views resulted in religious bigotry and chauvinism in the two halves of the country, and it surfaced as a major issue for propaganda during the Nigeria-Biafra debacle—Christian Biafra versus Moslem North.”⁴ This religious dichotomy in the thinking of the populace defied all informed logic during the war and has continued to militate against efforts at national integration.

The Christian Igbo vs. Moslem Hausa/Fulani stereotype of the civil war can easily be discountenanced by a simple analysis of the composition of the Nigerian army. The Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Nigerian armed forces, General Yakubu Gowon was a committed Christian just as a good number of the commanders were. “There is no question of religious warfare,” he once said, noting that as a Christian and the son of a Methodist minister, “if there were, I should be fighting on the Christian side.”⁵ His code of conduct for the war did in fact endeavour to dispel the religious war myth. “You are not fighting a war against a foreign enemy,” he wrote, “nor are you fighting a religious war or jihad. You are only subduing the rebellion of Lt-Col. [REDACTED] and his clique.”⁶ The majority of the foot soldiers were drawn from the Tiv Middle Belt region which was overwhelmingly Christian. More significantly, the war was between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria, the population of which is divided equally between adherents of Christianity and those of Islam. Besides, the Eastern Region was at the time one of three Catholic ecclesiastical provinces in Nigeria, the other two being Lagos and Kaduna. These facts do not fit into the garb of religious wars.

⁴ Bernard Odogwu, *No Place to Hide: Crises and Conflicts Inside Biafra* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 2002):191

⁵ Quoted in *Herald Tribune*, 31 October, 1967.

⁶ Quoted in Patrick A. Anwunah, *The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007): 202.

Yet, the religious stereotype remained a formidable force in the Nigeria-Biafra propaganda war not only in Biafra, but also among its foreign sympathizers. The General Assembly of the Church of England, for instance, while condemning the British Government's supply of arms to Nigeria, alleged that it was "helping an attack on Biafra by a mainly Muslim Army."⁷ Help was initially refused the Igbo refugees by the German Caritas on religious grounds. Such a help, it was argued, would be "a support for secession and a support for the holy war of the Christians against Islam."⁸

Against the background of this misconception, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene has emphasized that ethnicity, rather than religion, was the *radix malorum* of the Nigerian crisis. "The so-called Islamic factor," he said, "was far more of a cultural and social one, a way of life, rather than that of militant proselytism."⁹

This way of life was given free rein in the conduct of the masses in both camps of the religious and ethnic divide. In the North, the call for a jihad received instant and enthusiastic hearing. Reporting on the 1966 pogroms in Northern Nigeria, Walter Partington, a correspondent of the *Daily Express* of London, gave an account of a Hausa man in the suburbs of Zaria who declared: "we killed 250 of them here by the will of Allah!"¹⁰ This echoes the mood and the motivation of those who took active part in the pogroms and makes it hard to determine to what extent the Igbo were killed for their ethnicity and to what extent for their religion. At the same time, it provides an explanation for the astonishing

⁷ *West Africa*, 1 June 1968: 649.

⁸ [REDACTED] (hereafter cited as AGC): 187.1 b1af-02/1, P. Rabanser, "Fluechtlingsproblem in Nigeria," Freiburg, 30 October 1967.

⁹ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Research Report No. 27*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1975):15.

¹⁰ 6 October, 1966; see also F. Bonneville, *The Death of Biafra* (Gamma Agency, 1968; Translation from the French by Ikechukwu Orjinta, 2000), p. 84.

zealousness with which even women and children took part in the murder of so many of their fellow citizens. The actual position of Northern Christians with regard to the pogroms of 1966 is not immediately clear. Some have suggested that they took part in the killing of Igbos, thus exemplifying the notion that ethnicity, rather than religion, was at the core of the crisis.¹¹

Furthermore, ethnic hatred, rather than any notable religious grievance, was behind the May riots in Northern Nigeria following General Ironsi's broadcast on 23 May 1966 in which he proclaimed a unitary government in the place of the regions, the unification of the civil services, and the banning of political parties and tribal unions. Some of the placards carried by the irate demonstrators during the ensuing riots read: "Let There Be Secession," "We do not want Military Government," "No Unitary Government without Referendum," and "Down with Ironsi."¹² Not one of the placards called for a jihad or gave indication of a religious grievance. Although the issues raised in these placards were purely political, reports from Gusau and Sokoto said that Roman Catholic Churches led by American missionaries were torched and gave a death toll of sixty.¹³

It is generally believed that the May riots of 1966 were instigated by politicians who were disappointed "in their expectation that they would soon be returning to the fruits of office."¹⁴ A unitary government run by an Igbo Head of State ran contrary to these political expectations. Despite the attacks on Christians and their places of worship, religion had by May 1966 not been invoked as a pretext for violence. But the situation changed dramatically following the intervention of global Islam.

Following the Islamic terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 in New York and

¹¹ C. Ikeazor, *Nigeria 1966: The Turning Point* (London: New Millennium, 1997):193.

¹² *West Africa*, 4 June, 1966: 639.

¹³ See *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 619.

the Mohammed Cartoon Controversy of 2006, the world has now come to appreciate the complexities of trans-national Moslem solidarity. At the beginning of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict in 1966, the solidarity of global Islam was no less compelling in fanning the embers of religious violence and hatred.

There is ample evidence to show that the heightened tension in Northern Nigeria following the unfortunate killing of some prominent Moslem leaders in the January coup was exacerbated by inflammatory commentaries in the news media of Nigeria's Islamic neighbours. As soon as he became Military Head of State, Ironsi sent a four-man delegation to North Africa and some capital cities in the Middle East to explain that the January coup was not a Christian uprising against the Moslems. But the sharp reaction of the Arab world could not be ameliorated. A radio station in the United Arab Republic described the military coup as a Christian "Holy War" and called on the "Moslem Brothers in Northern Nigeria" to resist it.¹⁵ From Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, the Sardauna, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was the Vice President of the Islamic World League, was described as "an Islamic Hero," and the military coup as "a pestilential stench of Christian fanaticism and Zionist conspiracy," which was aimed only at "clipping the jaws of the Moslems in Nigeria."¹⁶

Sudan was fighting a bloody war at the time against secessionist Christians in the South and such inflammatory commentaries found willing ears not only in Sudan, but also in Northern Nigeria to which they were directed. The second wave of killings in September 1966 was in fact triggered off by a false radio announcement from Cotonou that Northern Moslems were being massacred in Eastern Nigeria. In a special message to the people of Northern Nigeria broadcast in English and Hausa, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the

¹⁵ AGC: 187-1 biaf -02/1, P. Rabanser, "Das Fluechtlingsproblem in Nigeria," Freiburg, 30 October 1967.

¹⁶ Quoted in Wolfgang Hoffmann, "Kirche im heutigen Nigeria," T.S. n.d.

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Armed Forces, made the following passionate appeal to the rampaging masses:

I receive complaints daily that up till now [October 1966] Easterners living in the North are being killed and molested and their property looted. I am very unhappy about this. We should put a stop to this. It appears that it is going beyond reason and is now at a point of recklessness and irresponsibility. We must remember that we shall be answerable to God....We should not believe rumours that are unfounded, and also we should not believe all the talk that other countries or their radio stations make without full analysis. We should be the people to tell them about our country, and not they to tell us about our country.¹⁷

It is believed that a total of 30,000 Easterners were killed in the pogroms of 1966. An overwhelming majority of the victims lost their lives in the September and October uprisings which were based on false rumours with strong religious colouration. It has been observed that "in a country where fantastic rumour-mongering aggravates a situation already saturated with danger, the Moslem Holy War theory is probably the most disturbing, if not the most credible."¹⁸

Nothing in the conduct of the masses and of their political and religious leaders in the days following the coup suggested that it

¹⁷ Quoted in *West Africa*, 8 October, 1966: 1140; despite his avowed concern, Gowon must be held accountable for the shame brought on the Nigerian state by the pogrom because the act was perpetuated under his regime and massively executed by regular soldiers for whom he was commander-in-chief; he did nothing to stop the killings but rather refused "to face up to the stark facts of the scale of brutalities in the North, and the extent of the Army's positive responsibilities for them." Memorandum from British High Commissioner to Sir Morris James of the Commonwealth Office, 1 Oct. 1966, quoted in Chibuike Uche, "Oil, British interests and the Nigerian Civil War," *Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 120.

¹⁸ Mary Cavanagh, "Loss and Gain in Nigeria," *The Tablet*, 18 February, 1967: 175.

was seen in the North as "a pestilential stench of Christian fanaticism and Zionist conspiracy," with the aim of "clipping the jaws of the Moslems in Nigeria." On the contrary, the January 15 coup was welcomed by a great majority of Nigerians "with the greatest outburst of national enthusiasm ever seen in the country."¹⁹ In the North the sweeping away of the former political leadership was most conspicuously welcomed not only by the ruling Northern Peoples Congress, NPC, but even by the older political leadership, or the religious group that Kirk-Greene calls "the emiratisists."²⁰ These were the feudal lords and their descendants who had acted as the custodians of political and religious authority since the time of the Sokoto caliphate. Together with the masses, they heeded the appeal to the Moslem population by Ironsi at the end of Ramadan 1966 to keep calm and cooperate with him in the restoration of law and order. As a result, the Eid-el-Fitr celebration marking the end of Ramadan passed off peacefully without incident, despite the official announcement of the death in the coup of the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa.²¹

The major newspapers reported cases of celebrations in the streets and of normal business activities in the markets just a day after the coup. A leading Northern politician, Aminu Kano, even counselled that the "Sardauna should be forgotten."²² Not even the Premier's lieutenants and close associates remembered at this point that he was "an Islamic Hero." This remarkable allegiance to keeping calm and restoring law and order was abandoned only after outside intervention, first by British propaganda, which made the coup look like a move towards Igbo domination of the country, and

¹⁹ Okwudiba Nnoli, "The Nigeria-Biafra Conflict: A Political Analysis," in Joseph Okpaku, ed. *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood*. New York: The Third Press, 1972: 121.

²⁰ *Research Report*, p. 5.

²¹ *West Africa*, 5 February, 1966: 155.

²² Quoted in M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993: 38. It an irony of fate that a Roman Catholic priest, Michael Audu Buba, was one of the few who went to the Sardauna's house to pray for the repose of his soul; see *ibid.* 59, note 21.

secondly by the appeal to Moslem brotherhood by global Islam. A leading figure in the Northern ruling class, Alhaji Ali Akilu, did not mince words about the extraneous causes of the turning point which nearly caused the demise of the Nigerian state. "We would have gone with things," he said, "but for the fact that we realised that by May, we were being manipulated."²³ Much of that manipulation came from Nigeria's Islamic neighbours, and the admixture of ethnicity and religion that followed did the damage.

It is worthy of note that the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in July 1967 coincided with the Arab-Israeli "six days war" of the same year and the significance of this was not overlooked in the religious propaganda war in Nigeria. The charge of a Zionist conspiracy theory became loud and when shooting war finally broke out between Nigeria and the secessionist region, volunteers from Sudan, Niger, Chad and Egypt fought in the federal army purely on religious grounds. The most cowardly and brutal bombings of civilian targets, which included churches, schools, hospitals and markets, were carried out by Egyptian pilots. It is doubtful whether they would have engaged in such acts of barbarism if they had been Christians themselves. Being Moslems, they apparently felt no guilt in the killing of the "infidels."

The membership of Jewish humanitarian organisations in the mainly Christian "Joint Church Aid" which ran the airlift for Biafra strengthened the Zionist conspiracy theory, and the charge was made that "the tragic plight of millions of Arab refugees languishing in the deserts has never evoked the sympathy of the World Council of Churches."²⁴ The twist in this indictment was that it was made by a Christian, one Ademola Thomas. He described what he called "the hypocritical stand taken by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in presenting the civil war as a religious strife between Moslems and Christians," as being

²³ Quoted in *ibid*: 38.

²⁴ *New Nigerian*, Saturday, 22 June, 1968.

in sharp contrast with the “non-interference of the World Moslem Movement.”²⁵

It is important to note that by the close of 1966, the Nigerian crisis had developed principally into an ideological confrontation between the Northern Moslems and the Christian Easterners, which included the Ibibio and the Efik. The involvement of the other Southern Christians in the struggle to uphold the unity of Nigeria did not change that thinking, thanks largely to the formidable propaganda machinery of the Biafran government. In the words of Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Biafran leader, the Biafrans were a terrified and frustrated people who had to grasp at every opportunity to secure sympathy. Religious propaganda, he said, was used in order to achieve a dual purpose, namely, to galvanise a common identity and motivation among Easterners, and to secure the sympathy and recognition of the Christian world.²⁶ The strategy worked superbly: a great majority of Biafrans indeed believed that they were fighting to preserve the Christian religion, and the Christian West, infinitely obsessed by Islamic ‘treachery’ lent sympathy and support.

As A.F. Walls has rightly commented, “a self-conscious Christian profession was part of the self-identity of Biafra.”²⁷ To the ordinary citizen of the region, this self-identity was adversely challenged by the pre-1966 conversion tours of the Sardauna which was generally viewed as an unprecedented threat from militant Islam. Accordingly, the war was viewed as a religious war right from the onset. On the foreign scene, the Sardauna’s proselytization mission also featured in the propaganda efforts of some of Biafra’s diehard supporters. Thus, Miss Helen Larbig was able to call attention in the following report to the age-long

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Interview at his Enugu Residence,” 21 November, 1998.

²⁷ “Religion and the Press in ‘the Enclave’ in the Nigerian Civil War,” *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fashole-Luke, et al. (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1978):209.

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religious ambition of the Northern oligarchy to continue the disrupted Islamic march to the sea:

Let no one deceive you! This is a war between Muslims and Christians. That does not mean that everyone in Northern Nigeria is a Moslem (for instance Lt-Col Yakubu Gowon himself is a Protestant) or that everyone in Biafra is a Christian. But one thing is certain: the leaders of the North, the Emirs, are hardened Muslims. Their former leader Ahmadu Bello once said that the British stopped the [Southwards] march of the Muslims at Ilorin and that now the Muslims will march to the sea, to Port Harcourt, to Warri and to Lagos. Anyone who says the war is not a religious war is either ignorant or extremely malicious.²⁸

Church- State Relations

Principally, church-state relations during the civil war centred on the effort of the governments on both sides of the conflict to integrate the missions and religious bodies into their war efforts. In Biafra, the need to mobilize public opinion in support of the war effort was particularly urgent. It is to the credit of the secessionist government's ingenuity that the masses experienced the war vicariously through war news and propaganda despite the constraints placed on the news media in the enclave. Radio Biafra never went off the air throughout the war and the print media somehow managed to weather a precarious existence. When paper could no longer be found, ruled college exercise books came to the rescue.

However, the need to "carry the people with us," as Ojukwu put it, needed much more than the news media. The creation of six propaganda 'fronts' in October 1968 was geared towards the

²⁸ AGC: 187.1 biaf- 01 L-R, Helen Maria Larbig, "Genocide in West Africa," p.4. The translation from the German original is mine.

achievement of this objective, and they included: the 'Churches Front,' 'Youths Front,' 'Farmers Front,' 'Traders Front,' 'Community Efforts Front,' and 'Workers Front.' The Ministry of Information of the new Republic set up these organisations as "compact propaganda platforms" to see to "the level of dedication of the masses and their organisations to Biafra's war of survival, their depth of understanding of what Biafra stands for, our type of war, their role in this war, a quick and right interpretation and assimilation of all Government statements, etc."²⁹

A committee of the Ministry of Information known as the Political Orientation Committee and popularly called the 'thinking House' of the Ministry, produced the guidelines which led to the creation of the propaganda fronts. Among them was a minority group which saw the separation of Church and State as an absolute necessity and therefore called for the exclusion of the Churches Front from the propaganda organs. However, religion in the enclave had, by 1968, become about the only rallying point for hope and spiritual comfort for the disillusioned and disorientated populace. The overriding significance of the churches' control over the masses was such that government could ill afford to exclude the Christian churches from its propaganda outfit. Consequently, the majority of the Political Orientation Committee members insisted on including the Churches Front among the propaganda platforms. A blue-print was worked out for it which required it not only to maintain a spiritual balance, among other things, but also to "ensure that the Churches through their peculiar organizations promote the Biafran ideals whose corner-stone is social justice."³⁰ However, the Catholic bishops of Biafra refused vehemently to be represented by the Churches Front with the argument that its aims and objectives smacked of communism.³¹ Until the Russians

²⁹ Enugu Diocesan Archives (EDA): "The Churches Front: A Brief."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

pitched their camp on the Nigerian side, the fear of Communism was a major concern for the Catholic bishops of Biafra.

There are some compelling evidence to support the conception of the Churches Front, and indeed of all the propaganda fronts, as having leftist leanings. The early 1960s was a time of nationalist political struggles across Africa. These movements were predominantly leftist in orientation. At the height of the cold war, it was usual for socialist countries of the Soviet Bloc to eagerly lend their support to known freedom fighters. A newspaper in Prague claimed that Ojukwu was of the opinion at the beginning of 1967 that "socialism was the only fitting ideology for the developing countries."³² Another foreign newspaper, the *Neues Deutschland*, said that Ojukwu sent envoys to the socialist states to express Biafra's determination to embrace socialism.³³ There are no independent sources to ascertain the veracity of these claims, but early in the armed conflict and long before the creation of the propaganda fronts, the bishops of the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province had passed a unanimous decision not to support "any brand of Communism no matter how plausible the motives might appear."³⁴

The training and career of the leader of the Youths Front, Major Philip Alale, provided further room for suspicion. He obtained his degree in economics from Moscow University, and during the rule of Kwame Nkrumah, was a senior member of the Ghanaian government in charge of the Nkrumah Brigade and various labour movements.³⁵ As Chairman of the Youth Movement in Biafra, his influence on the workers' movements and indeed on almost all the propaganda apparatus of the government before and during the armed conflict was enormous. It is safe to assume that as

³² *Volkszeitung*, 19 April, 1968.

³³ 16 January, 1968.

³⁴ EDA: Minutes of the Meeting of the Bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province Held at Bishop's House Ikot-Ekpene on Friday, 24 November, 1967.

³⁵ NC News Service (of the U.S. Catholic Conference), Tuesday, 30 May, 1967.

a driving force in the Political Orientation Committee of the Ministry of information, he provided the conceptual and ideological underpinnings of all the propaganda fronts, including the churches front. Seen against this background, therefore, the charge that Communism was deeply at work at the Churches front is a legitimate assumption. In fact, in one of its invitation letters to the bishops, the churches front requested the church leaders to send representatives to a seminar on the "Ahiara Declaration," a document which has been described as a desperate but unsuccessful effort of Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to insert a kind of Christian utopianism into his ideological code for the war.³⁶

However, the true reason for the opposition of the Catholic Bishops of Biafra to the Biafran Government's Churches Front is to be sought outside the aims and objectives of the propaganda outfit. As attested to by the representative of the Catholic Church in the organisation, who happened to be the front's Deputy National Chairman, there was nothing in its agenda that was incompatible with the war efforts of the Church itself, particularly as it was "an organ for conveying information to every segment of the Biafran community in such a manner as to help sustain high morale during this crisis." He urged the Catholic hierarchy in Biafra "to realize clearly that what the Church does in practice is more relevant to any situation than any number of statements of principle," and saw the Churches Front as "a factor that could easily forge minor links of Church and State relationship."³⁷

The Bishops were not convinced, and they resolved that their representative's role in the organisation "should be guided by the attitude of their Lordships towards it, vis-à-vis the organisation's threat to the security of the Church."³⁸ They seemed to be

³⁶ See Jonathan Benthall, *Disaster, Relief and the Media* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993; rpt. 1995), p.95.

³⁷ EDA: "The Churches Front: A Brief."

³⁸ EDA: "Minutes of Bishops' Meeting held at the Mission House Ugiri, Umuahia, on Friday, 18 July, 1969.

distrustful of the existence of a separate body with which the government preferred to have direct dealings. For instance, the Churches Front was, among other things, calling for prayers for the new nation, a directive which was seen as an exclusive preserve of the religious leaders.

The reference to the “security of the Church” was hardly surprising, given the friction which had arisen in the relation between the Catholic Church and the Biafran government. Two areas of friction deserve special mention. Firstly, the frequent attempts of the government instituted Rehabilitation Commission to control Caritas relief materials was totally unacceptable to the bishops and they thought it opportune “to remind the Commission that the Church should not be considered an arm of the Government for any motives whatsoever.”³⁹ The second instance concerned government policy moves towards the administration and control of schools in post-war Biafra. The Catholic Church, which was a major player in the educational sector, was not invited to discussions on this traditionally sensitive issue.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the creation of the Churches Front was perceived as a ploy “to subjugate the church and make it a powerful mouth-piece of the Ministry of Information.”⁴¹ The Church leaders therefore resolved not to be “subservient to any government or organisation” because she was “divinely constituted and an *autonomous front*

³⁹ EDA: ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the Bishops of Biafra Held at the Mission House at Amimo, Owerri on 30 Monday, 1968’

⁴⁰ See EDA: “Francis Arinze to Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu,” 30 April, 1969; “Catholic Bishops of Biafra to Sir Louis Mbanefo, Chief Justice of Biafra,” Onitsha, 26 May, 1969. For more information on Church-State relation in education, see Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria, 1886-1950* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).

⁴¹ EDA: “Minutes of the Bishops’ Meeting held at the Mission House, Ugiri, Umuahia, Friday, 18 July, 1969.”

owing no allegiance to any earthly power and whose sole aim was to continue the mission of Christ on earth.”⁴²

There are parallels in church-state relations in the 1960s in Biafra and Tanzania, one of the four African countries that accorded diplomatic recognition to the break-away region. Its president, Julius Nyerere, was the prime architect of a political project called the *ujamaa*, an African radical socialism with a considerable amount of religious freedom.⁴³ The Christian Churches in Tanzania, like their Biafran counterparts, voiced their opposition for fear of communism, and of losing their influence on society.

There is a controversy over the actual motive behind Nyerere's recognition of Biafra. The man himself took every opportunity to explain that his decision was informed by humanitarian imperatives and by the logic that a policy which recognises starvation as “a legitimate war weapon against an enemy,” perforce recognizes that victory by one side “leads to conquest and domination.”⁴⁴ Unity, he believed, can only be based on a willing consent of the parties involved. But when a substantial part of a political union ceases to believe that a state and its government are there for it, then “this union ceases to exist.”⁴⁵ For the *New Nigerian*, the official media voice of the North, however, the Tanzanian leader acted in political self-interest, and the argument proffered was, as would be expected, clothed in a religious garb. It claimed that Nyerere was brought up by the Presbyterians, “a sect which is singularly intolerant and dogmatic.”⁴⁶ The truth is that Nyerere was Catholic but his deputy

⁴² Ibid. The emphasis is mine.

⁴³ See Frieder Ludwig, *Das Modell Tanzania: Zum Verhältnis zwischen Kirche und Staat während der Ära Nyerere* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (Paris: Jeune Afrique, 1971):144.

⁴⁵ Julius Nyerere, “Why We Recognized Biafra,” 2000: *Magazin für Mensch und Zukunft*, Nr. 2, August 1968:11.

⁴⁶ Friday, 3 May 1968.

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and political rival, Oscar Kambona, was Presbyterian. The latter was offered an executive job at the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva where Francis Ibiam, former Governor of the Eastern Region and special adviser to Ojukwu, was one of the six presidents. The *New Nigerian* argues that an alliance with Ibiam and by extension with the Presbyterian world would give Kambona a political edge over Nyerere. Therefore, "if recognizing the rebellion in Nigeria could...stem the tide of the fury of Ibiam and his organization and deny Kambona a base, [Nyerere] would do it. And he did it."⁴⁷ Whatever the truth may be, Nyerere may have seen in Ojukwu's Ahiara declaration some enticing parallels to his *ujamaa* political movement, albeit in a less radical form. In other words, ideological affinity may have in some way influenced his decision to support Ojukwu's revolution.

The refusal of the Catholic Church in Biafra to belong to a state-instituted propaganda front did not preclude its readiness to act as "an autonomous front" that was desirous of making valuable contributions to the war effort. Not a few of the expatriate missionaries earnestly wised that the secession had never happened. This could not be said of the native clergy. The Christian religion was the established religion of the new republic and in the Weberian sociological category, the church "accommodates the values and goals of civic society, legitimating the affairs of state and providing ceremonial backing for state events."⁴⁸ It was John Anyiogwu, the Catholic Bishop of Enugu, who preached the sermon in an inter-denominational service organized for God's protection of the new state. It was he who blessed the new Biafran flag, the most visible sign of the region's newly won statehood. The contributions made by the Catholic Church to the war effort included therefore not only the provision of army chaplains and praying for divine intervention, but also the willingness to highlight the religious dimension of the war in their bid to give "the true

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ George D. Chryssides, *Exploring New Religions* (London: Continuum, 1999):4f.

picture” of the war at home and abroad. Although there was never a collective statement from their Lordships to the effect that the war was religious, individual opinions in that direction did surface. For instance, the one that described the conflict as “a struggle between Christians and the devil,” and urged the Biafrans to “fight hard to ensure the preservation of their religion and culture.”⁴⁹

On the Protestant side, the religious ticket was expectedly more forcefully employed. Both the defunct Regional Government and the Biafran Military Government were overwhelmingly Protestant and cordial Church-state relations in both cases were rather taken for granted. Francis Akanu Ibiam, Governor of the former Eastern Region was special advisor to the Biafran Military Governor. His position as one of the six Presidents of the World Council of Churches and as a missionary medical official of the Presbyterian Church made it difficult to differentiate between his private opinion and those of the organisations he worked for. During the war, he became perhaps the most prominent religious propagandist for the secessionist cause. In several trips and conferences in Europe and America, he emphasized the religious dimension of the war in very strong terms. In a protest letter to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in which he renounced the Knighthood and other Honours bestowed on him by the British Government, he held the view that “it is an ardent desire of the Hausa/Fulani and Moslem Northern Nigeria to subjugate Biafra and kill Christianity in our country.”⁵⁰ In the passionately worded letter, the former Governor made no distinction between Moslem Northern Nigeria and Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. “It is simply staggering,” he said, “for a Christian Country like Britain to help a Moslem country militarily to crush another Christian country like Biafra.”⁵¹ During his Goodwill tour of Europe and North America in January and February 1968, he declared that “If the

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Biafra Sun*, Monday, 18 December, 1967.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *Kwenu*: Special Edition (Bloomfield, 1997): 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

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world, especially the churches, do not help us, we shall all die
and Christianity in Nigeria shall die with us.”⁵²

Such extreme views led many to wonder “whether the Church on either side of the Niger has not become a tool in the propaganda machinery of the military administrations.”⁵³ Dr. Ibiam was able to arouse not only the interests of the world Christians in the happenings in Biafra, but also the attention of the world press. While he was still in Germany, in February 1968, the *Nordddeutscher Rundfunk* (Northern German Radio) announced that Biafra was threatened with genocide. On the same day, a TV series, “Aus der christlichen Welt (From the Christian World) aired an interview with two Biafrans living in Germany who said that the main cause of the war was the more than twenty years long religious conflict between the Muslims in the North and the Christians in the South.”⁵⁴

The willingness of the Christian churches to act as a front for the war effort independently or in conjunction with the government was perhaps the greatest boon for the secessionist cause. It all started with the historic visit to the Biafran enclave in February 1968 of a Papal delegation. An editorial in the *Biafra Sun* described the visit as “a beam of light with which Biafra saw the light of salvation in her current war of survival.”⁵⁵ What was actually meant by “light of salvation” could be deduced from the next line which says that “this made it impossible for Mr. Harold Wilson and his criminal collaborators to accomplish the total extermination of the people of Biafra before the outside world could know what was

⁵² Akanu Ibiam, “Paper Presented to the Workshop on Human Rights,” Bonn, 21 January, 1968.

⁵³ Christian Council of Nigeria, *Christian Concern in the Nigerian Civil War: A Collection of Articles which have appeared in Issues of The Nigerian Christian from April 1967 to 1969* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1969): 111

⁵⁴ Gernot N. Zieser, “Die Propagandastrategie ‘Biafras’ im Nigerianischen Bürgerkrieg,” Dissert. University of Salzburg, 1970, p. 57.

⁵⁵ *Biafra Sun*, Thursday, 28 November, 1968.

happening.”⁵⁶ The visit of the Papal Delegation afforded the beleaguered secessionists an important link with the outside world. It gave rise to a chain of events in Biafra: the visit of all England Churches Delegation, the intervention of Caritas Internationalis and the World Council of Churches with relief materials, diplomatic reactions and recognitions.

The Papal envoys were the first independent and neutral observers to visit Nigeria and Biafra at the early stage of the conflict. Having first visited Nigeria in December 1967, and after consultations with political and church leaders there, they were able afterwards to confirm that the civil war in Nigeria had no religious underpinnings. That verdict was fundamental in shaping official Catholic policy towards the breakaway region. At no point during the three-year conflict did the Catholic hierarchy affirm that the Nigeria/Biafra war was religiously motivated. But, as we shall see below, that visit and the subsequent humanitarian intervention by the Pope and Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican co-ordinator of all Catholic charities around the world, did heighten the religious debate in Nigeria. Numerous newspaper articles and editorials began to call for the expulsion of foreign missionaries and for the creation of a Nigerian National Church. It was at this stage that religion was accorded a dominant place in national politics. The Christians were generally viewed as enemies of the nation by Moslems and the frustrated Federal Military Government accused the Christian churches of prolonging the war by giving relief aid to the secessionists. These charges and the religious debates they generated placed the Christians on the Nigerian side in an ambiguous position.

The Role of the Press

On inception, the Republic of Biafra inherited all the organs of mass communication of the former Eastern Region. These included

⁵⁶ Ibid.

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the Eastern Nigeria Radio Corporation, a TV station, a government press and the newspaper, the *Nigerian Outlook*. These mass communication outfits were put at the disposal of the influential Ministry of Information which, during the war, was staffed with brilliant academic personnel like Dr. Ifegwu Eke, its commissioner, Cyprain Ekwensi and Uche Chukwumeriji, just to mention a few. A multiplicity of other print media sprang up after secession and during the war with the *Biafran Sun* and the *Daily Flash* being the most popular.

One remarkable 'coup' through which Biafra outsmarted Nigeria in the propaganda war was the early use of public relations firms. Two such firms were already in the employment of the Eastern Region by the time secession took place, namely, Ruder & Finn in New York and External Development Services in London. These were traditional public relations outfits that specialized in attracting peacetime investments and loans from abroad. They were seen as unsuitable for the new dispensation of struggle for sovereignty and recognition. By the end of 1967, they had been replaced by Goldstein Enterprises and Markpress, two agencies that employed broad outsider strategies that appealed to public opinion through mass media.⁵⁷ Mr. Goldstein was publicity expert of a Jewish organization for the defence of the rights of oppressed minorities and it was through Fr. Kennedy, a former missionary in Eastern Nigeria, that he came to work for Biafra. His firm, Goldstein Enterprises based in California, specialized in press and television public relations and it was it that arranged for the first crew of journalists that came into Biafra on 26 January 1968.

Mr. Bernstein, the owner of the Geneva based Markpress, had no prior training in political public relations. Markpress, depended, rather to its discredit, mainly on information supplied by the overseas press service of the Directorate of Propaganda of the Ministry of Information which relished in referring to it as "our

⁵⁷ Moris Davis, *Interpreters for Nigeria: The Third World and International Public Relations* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977):107.

post office.”⁵⁸ The problem was that Radio Biafra as well as the numerous local print media were concerned chiefly with internal propaganda the content of which has been described as “frequently vitriolic, fiery, bellicose, morale-boosting, or fear-arousing, and as a result, hardly a trustworthy guide to reality.”⁵⁹

Two important moral-boosting or fear-arousing propaganda subject matters were the issues of genocide and the religious war proposition. The rationale for clinging tenaciously to these two subjects has been best explicated by Ojukwu, the Biafran leader, himself. According to him, the Biafrans were a terrified and frustrated people, who had to use every opportunity to secure sympathy whenever it presented itself. They had to express their fears and disappointment to their religious masters and teachers—the missionaries—whenever they saw one on a visit.⁶⁰ The missionaries and Christian aid workers did visit Biafra in their hundreds and the propaganda subjects of choice did spread accordingly.

The reference to fear and disappointment is significant. The impact of the massacres in the North on the people of Biafra was stunning. The debilitating war that followed during which the massacres continued in 1967—at Ibagwa on 10 July, in Ogoja about the same time, the mass killings in Asaba and Calabar in October—imposed a great deal of psychological trauma on the general populace. The government was under pressure to provide answers as to why its people were subjected to this fearful ordeal. It fell back on the one prominent answer provided by the killers themselves—the liquidation of the infidels. As one pro-Biafra British member of parliament put it, Biafran propaganda may be discredited, but the statement credited to Colonel Benjamin Adekunle which said: “Shoot everything at sight whether it moves or not,” did not come from Biafran sources.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

⁶⁰ Personal Interview, Enugu, 21 November, 1998.

⁶¹ Davis, *Interpreters*, p. 125.

The people of Biafra were disappointed that the Christian world did not come to their aid at the hour of their greatest tribulation. The conspiracy of silence with which the Western governments greeted the Biafran debacle was based on the quick kill theory which was generally regarded as the best humane solution to the problem. When Biafra survived the pangs of birth, and famine and mass deaths forced a rethink, and led to the humanitarian intervention of the Christian churches, the religious war proposition was found to be propitious to the relief effort. It was not surprising therefore, that the religious crusade was most intensive in foreign print media, especially those circulated by the numerous clandestine groupings that raised funds for the airlift. It was the foreign news media which often read religious meanings into political, and sometimes criminal, incidents.

A typical example was an incident that took place on 23 May 1968, when one Johnson Banjo, a member of a Nigerian delegation to Commonwealth peace talks in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, mysteriously disappeared from his hotel room. Uganda was supporting the southern Sudanese who were also fighting a secessionist civil war. The abduction and subsequent killing of a Nigerian delegation led to wild speculations. While most newspapers in Nigeria, including the Northern pro-Islam *New Nigerian*, spoke of foul play by "rebel agents,"⁶² some foreign news media blamed the incident on "anti-Islamic south Sudanese immigrants in Uganda."⁶³ The fact that the search for Banjo was concentrated mainly on the houses of this group and in Jewish quarters in Kampala reinforced this speculation.

Sometimes, even propaganda outcry against genocide in Biafra was couched in religious rhetoric, like this imagery that appeared in the *Spiegel*, a reputable German magazine. "God," it said "could one day be accused of racism because all the seats in heaven have been occupied by 'black souls,' namely, those who

⁶² *New Nigerian*, Thursday, 6 and Saturday, 8 June 1968; *Daily Times*, Friday, 21 June, 1968

⁶³ *Prisma der Welt*, Tuesday, 28 May, 1968.

had to die just because the Christian nations out of indolence and political calculations wallowed in their own sins.”⁶⁴

Meanwhile, Nigeria was losing the propaganda war to the chagrin of both its non-Christian citizens and its foreign supporters. This is how one British MP put it:

...recently the High Commissioner in London, Brigadier Ogundipe, informed us that about a year ago, when he was advised by various people here that he ought to do something about the flood of propaganda in favour of the so-called Biafrans and ought to engage some public relations firm of equal standing to take up the Federal cause, [he] received from General Gowon in reply an emphatic negative. General Gowon said: “I was trained in the British tradition, and I believe that in the end the truth will prevail. I do not want any public relations firm to help me do this.” My Lords, events have moved in the direction of showing that, noble as those sentiments are, apparently in the wicked world as it is today if you want to battle with highly-skilled perversions of the truth you must engage people who are trained in that technique.⁶⁵

Nigeria did employ the services of public relations firms like the London based Galitzine and Partners. But as the statement above shows, they were ineffective in swaying public opinion. Rather belatedly the FMG intensified the propaganda war on two fronts—through press releases from its diplomatic missions abroad and through pressure on the Christian leaders at home. As we shall see later the pressure on the Christian leaders to undertake world-wide counter measures against the religious war theory proved very effective. Within Nigeria itself, Christian writers spearheaded the media onslaught on the Caritas led humanitarian organizations.

⁶⁴ Vol. 22, no. 29 (July, 1968).

⁶⁵ Quoted in Davis, *Interpreters*, p. 144.

Remarkably, they tended to see every action or pronouncement of the Pope and of the aid agencies against the background of the religious propaganda. Bizarre as this may appear, it can only be understood against the background of the obsessive worry and mindset of the political leaders over the religious war crusade. One example is noteworthy.

On 21 July 1968, Pope Paul VI officially declared that food and medicine had been flown into blockaded Biafra. Seen from the point of view of the Federal Government, four main objections were raised, firstly, the mention of "Biafra" in the Pope's statement implied a tacit recognition of the secession. Secondly, breaching the blockade was a deliberate disregard of Nigeria's territorial sovereignty. Thirdly, the gesture was interpreted that the Pope had succumbed to the propaganda that the war was religiously motivated. Fourthly, by praising the Igbo Christians, the Pope was seen to reduce the Catholics of the other regions to second-class Christians.

For the Pope and Caritas Internationalis, the third and fourth objections were hardly worth losing word over. At the time of the Pope's statement and throughout the war, Caritas was aiding victims of the war on both sides. The first and second objections were what caused a great deal of concern in Rome. The word Biafra was never again used by the Pope and the Vatican. As for the charge of political involvement, the Pope would say that he never engaged in politics "in the proper sense of the term."⁶⁶ Through Caritas, he broke the blockade with the argument that "the moral obligation of assisting starving people was greater than the political obligation of maintaining good relationship with the Federal Government."⁶⁷

Curiously, however, the flurry of media onslaught with which the Pope's revelation was received centred exclusively on the religious war interpretation. The *Daily Times* accused the Pope of taking the attitude that the crisis was a religious war. It highlighted

⁶⁶ *West Africa*, 9 Aug. 1969, p. 941.

⁶⁷ AGC: 187.1 biaf -11/2, "History of the Relief Programme to Biafra."

the call of the Lagos branch of the Catholic Youth Organization on the Catholic priests “throughout the world” to always consult with the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos before making their stories public.⁶⁸ In a front-page comment, the *Nigerian Tribune* began by saying that the Pope’s public admission “implicitly confirmed the suspicions of many that the Vatican has succumbed to the rebel propaganda that the Nigerian civil war is a religious war between Hausa Muslims and Ibo Christians.”⁶⁹ It then went over to lampoon Caritas for not showing equal concern for the Christians in the liberated areas.

The worst opprobrium came from the Ibadan based *Sketch*. “The Catholic Church,” it said, “is subscribing to the untruth that the war in Nigeria is mainly religious. To work in this fashion at a time when even the Church is fighting strenuously for world-wide unity is to plead guilty to a charge of hypocrisy....It is also bound to raise, in many minds, the question of how well-intentioned and informed after all, are the reforms hitherto carried out by the Pope.”⁷⁰

The question may be asked how it came about that virtually every mass media in Nigeria singled out the religious war propaganda as an appropriate response to the Pope’s humanitarian intervention. The answer lies in the mindset of the FMG. Faulty perceptions are common in war. They were the norm in the Federal Government’s dealings with the Vatican. The papers quoted above got their story from the same source—Mr Edwin Ogbu, Nigeria’s Ambassador to the United Nations. As soon as the Pope made his relief efforts in the Biafran enclave public, the Ambassador gave a press conference which opened with: “We have protested to the Pope through the Papal delegate in Lagos that he is taking the attitude that this is a religious war, which it is not....We feel that the whole attitude of introducing religion into the civil war is

⁶⁸ Wednesday, 31 July, 1968.

⁶⁹ Thursday, 1 August, 1968.

⁷⁰ 23 July, 1968. The reference to “reforms” was to the Second Vatican Council which ended in 1965.

Blaming the Gods: Religious Propaganda in Nigeria-Biafra War 67 completely unfortunate.”⁷¹ As the best possible counter measure against the religious crusade, government officials urged Christians to take up the challenge themselves.

Sometimes the methods of media attacks employed were intended to ridicule rather than inform, like this one from the *Daily Times*:

Dr. Mbadiwe whom the rebels styled their ‘Minister of Trade’ went to the United States recently and told Americans that he ‘resigned from the Federal Government in 1965 when he and his Christian colleagues discovered a plan by corrupt Moslem leaders to declare Nigeria a Moslem country and to involve her against Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict.’ He also said that there was ‘a plan to close all Catholic schools in the country and that several were actually closed. After the coup of January 1966, this plan was foiled and the Moslems in anger waged war on Catholic Ibos killing more than 30,000 in two days. As all the Ibos were Catholics it became impossible for them to continue in Nigeria hence they seceded.’”⁷²

Muslim contribution to the whole religious debate was noticeably absent for good reason: the slightest attack on the Pope or the Christian relief agencies would have given instant credence to the charge that the war had religious underpinnings. Instead, the Christians were encouraged to spearhead the campaign in the Christian dominated Southern news media. The few occasions the issue of religion was raised in the *New Nigerian*, the pro-Islam voice of the North, it was Christians who spoke on behalf of Muslims. Thus it was a Christian, Thomas Ademola, who called attention to the plight of Arab refugees in the Middle East and the policy of non-interference of the World Moslem

⁷¹ *Daily Times*, Wednesday, 31 July, 1968.

⁷² Wednesday, 12 June, 1968.

Movement.⁷³ Another Catholic, Ambrose Gapsule, President of the Ahmadu Bello University Students' Union Zaria, expressed surprise "to see a high hierarchy falling victim to the rebels' propaganda."⁷⁴ He was referring to Cardinal Heenan's pro-Biafra sermon in Westminster Cathedral in June of 1968. "We in this part of the country," he said "are perhaps more 'Catholic' than people he described as 'Biafrans'."⁷⁵

Whenever the *New Nigerian* attacked Rome directly, it did so on behalf of the Christians. This was the case when the Pope intervened on behalf of the Italian oil workers captured by Biafran forces in 1969. In an editorial, the paper criticized the uproar this caused in the Western world and the hasty way the Pope despatched an envoy to Ojukwu for their release. "The Vatican's disproportionate activities in this episode," it said, "will render their protestation that all Christians are equal suspect. Nigerians will believe that blood is thicker than sacramental water."⁷⁶

Christians in the Propaganda War

Right from the beginning of the Nigerian Crisis the bishops of the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province did not have a view concerning the religious nature of the conflict that was contrary to the perception of the general public. It is important to bear in mind that from the beginning of the pogroms in May 1966 to the outbreak of the war in July 1967, the conflict was primarily, if not exclusively, between the Moslem North and the Christian Easterners. In other words, for more than one year, the impression generated by the racist pogroms which were directed exclusively against the Igbo was that of the Moslem North killing the Christian Igbo. Killing the infidels in the name of Allah was the overarching motivation for the majority of

⁷³ *New Nigerian*, Saturday, 22 June, 1968.

⁷⁴ *New Nigerian*, Friday, 14 June, 1968.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Monday, 2 June 1968.

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the masses who took part in the pogroms in the North and they declared this openly. The bishops of Biafra as religious leaders could not overlook this religious dimension which was prevalent in the perception of the people in the region.

However, a measure of contrariety overshadowed this religious outlook as soon as two largely Christian armies faced each other in July 1967. The situation was exacerbated when the Biafran Government raised religion to a pivotal level in its propaganda war. The bishops suddenly found themselves neither affirming nor denying the religious nature of the war. Archbishop Francis Arinze was the President of the Biafran Bishops Conference during the war. With his appointment in July 1967 as metropolitan of the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province at the age of 35, he became one of the youngest archbishops of the Catholic Church. Like all the church leaders, he was primarily appalled by the mass killings which to all intents and purposes assumed genocidal proportions as the siege of the enclave progressed. Without being un-equivocal about the religious propaganda, he regarded its discourse as totally irrelevant. This position comes out clearly in a short report he sent to Bishop H. Tenhumberg of the German Catholic Office in Bonn:

Some people say that the war is not religious and that therefore the Africans should be left to solve their tribal quarrels. The answer is that there is not one single cause of the war. There are many causes: political, tribal, economic, British interests, religious and cultural. Granted that the war is not religious, does it then follow that the Biafrans should be massacred? Have they none at all of the fundamental human rights?⁷⁷

However, like many Biafrans he expected that the religion of the Western nations and their leaders should have swayed their

⁷⁷ AGC : 187.1 biaf -01 A-F. Francis Arinze, "Reflections on the Nigeria-Biafra War," July 1968.

decisions in favour of Biafra: "The Biafrans," he said, "are shocked that even governments of Christian countries can be so selfish, heartless, and unchristian. Are the Biafrans wrong to regard many statesmen in Italy, France, Spain, America and even Ireland as afraid to allow their Christianity to influence their politics?"⁷⁸ Insights such as these were crucial in swaying the sympathy of the world's Christians for Biafra. The total blockade of the Eastern Region by the federal government had had devastating effects in the area even before the start of the war. The eastern region has one of the world's largest population densities and the nutritional situation there was always volatile. Its protein need depended almost entirely on import, and total blockade of the region by mid 1968, when Port Harcourt was captured, precipitated the worst famine the world has ever known. An estimated 10,000 people, mostly children, were dying daily in the Biafran enclave by June and July 1968. It was against this background that Archbishop Arinze made his remarks in July. By October 1968 the Christian churches around the globe had put in place the "Joint Church Aid," a consortium of over 33 charities that undertook the largest airlift anywhere since the Berlin airlift. In pursuit of their large-scale donation drives for Biafra, diverse groups and individuals discovered that maximum results came largely from the use of the twin tickets of genocide and religious war propaganda.

But, while the religious crusade undertaken tacitly by the Christian churches was good for the relief effort, it presented a dilemma for the Christians on the Nigerian side of the conflict. The problem was how to publicly criticize the humanitarian endeavours of their mother churches in an anti-Christian environment. The general public and the various levels of government deplored the perceived nonchalance of the Nigerian Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, in the face of the successful but destructive religious propaganda of their Biafran counterparts. In a goodwill message to the Nigerian Catholic bishops meeting in conference,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

General Gowon, the Head of State, extolled the records of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, but at the same time he expressed his “dismay and disappointment” over the “anti-Nigeria acts” of some members of the Catholic Church overseas, who have, among other things, “dubbed our present crisis a religious war.”⁷⁹ He expected them as spiritual leaders to give unflinching support to the struggle for a united Nigeria. “All we want of you,” he said, “was to tell the wide world the truth of our situation.”⁸⁰

Similar official coercion was also exerted on the leadership of the Protestant churches. During the 55th Baptist convention in Benin, for instance, the Military Governor of the Midwest, Lt. Col. Samuel Ogbemudia, had the following to say:

While Christian leaders in Britain and Ireland had been writing dangerously biased letters in newspapers and periodicals, Nigeria’s Christian leaders have said nothing in reply. Instead, they have given the impression that their silence is a confirmation that the lies inspired in the World Council of Churches against the Federal Government by Sir Francis Ibiam are true....For instance, if our own Christian leaders had the courage, early enough, to rebut the allegation that the Moslem North was trying to exterminate the Christian East, the rebels would not have received the moral, religious and financial support which has so enabled them to resist lawful authority for so long....Just two weeks ago, when the bad had been done, *and after a lot of prodding*, the Nigerian Council of Churches belatedly came out, through their secretary, the Rev. Canon J.A. Falope, with a statement which even at this stage of the War was

⁷⁹ AGC: 187.1 nige-02/1, “Goodwill Message By His Excellency Major-General Gowon, Head of the Federal Military Government, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces To the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, 30 September, 1969.”

⁸⁰ Ibid.

too feeble to give categorical support to the Federal Government.⁸¹

This unrelenting “prodding” finally paid dividends in May 1968 when the Nigerian Council of Churches announced its resolve to send three separate delegations to the US, Canada and Western European countries “to explain the true acts of the Nigerian crisis.”⁸² In the words of Bishop Kale, the Anglican bishop of Lagos, the delegation would, among other things, “counteract the world-wide opinion that the current crisis in the country is a religious one.”⁸³ Archbishop Aggey, the Chairman of the Nigerian Catholic Episcopal Conference was present during the joint declaration of the Nigerian Council of Churches in May and addressed a press conference during which he too reiterated the need to tell the outside world that the war in Nigeria had no religious connotation.

This centre stage accorded the religious war propaganda in the overall concern of the Nigerian Christians becomes all the more astonishing when viewed against the background of other serious allegations like genocide and the violation of human rights levelled against the Federal Military Government. The reason centred principally on a general concern among church leaders over the future of the church in Nigeria. The Joint Church Aid, regarded as the world’s largest ecumenical venture, consisted largely of two main blocks—Caritas Internationalis, the coordinator of all Catholic charities around the globe, and the Protestant World Council of Churches (WCC). These two groupings were daily castigated over the radio and in the print media. Caritas and the Pope in particular were singled out for forceful denunciation for pioneering and sustaining the breaching of the Blockade. The call was made daily for the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries and for the establishment of a national church independent of the

⁸¹ Quoted in *New Nigerian*, Wednesday, 8 May 1968; the emphasis is mine.

⁸² *Daily Times*, Friday, 31 May 1968.

⁸³ *New Nigerian*, Friday, 31 May 1968.

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Vatican. Just how precarious life in Nigeria had become for the Catholic Church is evident in the following report from Ibadan:

A crisis over involvement of Catholics in the Nigerian civil war that has been smouldering for some time has suddenly blown up to serious proportions. Sharp criticism of Caritas and of certain missionary priests has mounted in Press, on Radio and on TV. Some commentators have sought to bring the whole Catholic Church under censure and have even called for the expulsion of missionaries, citing the example of Guinea. A picture of Pope Paul VI has appeared in the daily newspaper, *The Morning Post*, captioned 'He is aiding the rebels'....Such criticisms have brought acute and dangerous embarrassment to Catholics in the Federal area of Nigeria, and there are many fears as to the possible consequences. Members of the Legion of Mary report that in the course of their visitation duty they are being turned away from houses as 'the people who love war'.⁸⁴

On the Protestant side, the situation was no less precarious. Akanu Ibiam may be one of the Presidents of the WCC, but the fact was that most members of the organization were on the Nigerian side of the conflict. The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) was a registered member of the WCC and its leaders were on the Nigerian side of the conflict. The involvement of the WCC in the Biafran crisis, especially as it concerned the religious war propaganda, was received with deep concern in Nigeria. Nigerian delegation to any WCC international meeting therefore took it as a duty to make this concern known to the world body. The WCC eventually withdrew from the airlift and cited as reason "the ambiguous position in which the tremendous effort has put

⁸⁴ International Fides Service, no. 2150, 11 December, 1968.

Christian people, Churches and agencies because of its political side-effects.”⁸⁵

The Catholic bishops took their case to Rome on 4 December 1968 and their first port of call was the headquarters of Caritas Internationalis. The Secretary General of the organization, Msgr. Bayer, had no problems in convincing them that the religious war propaganda was never an issue in Catholic official policy. He reiterated what he had had occasion to state several times since the allegation emerged, namely, that “Since the inception of the relief programme, at the time of the Monsignori Conway and Rocheau’s mission, Caritas Internationalis avoided taking any such stand. Nor did Caritas ever affirm in any document that this was a religious war between Muslim Hausas and Christian Ibos. Caritas aids war victims on both sides.”⁸⁶ When their lordships returned home from their Rome visit, they became fearless defenders of Caritas, the Pope and the humanitarian intervention in the break-away region.

The counter propaganda efforts of the Protestants also produced remarkable results. After speaking to the English base of the religious crusaders, opposition from the Anglican Church was relaxed. The Archbishop of Canterbury, a prominent advocate for Biafran independence, is quoted as writing a letter to the Observer in which he denied that the Nigeria-Biafra war was religiously motivated and that “the policy of the British Government was the best that could be pursued in the difficult situation.”⁸⁷ This seismic

⁸⁵ Joint Church Aid (JCA) Press Release no. 120, “Statement made at the 5th JCA Plenary Session, Sandeford, Norway,” 8 December, 1969; see also *The Times of London*, 2 February, 1970.

⁸⁶ NAI: RCM BD 1/168, “Caritas Internationalis denies the Charges Formulated in the Press Release No. F.30001 of 26 November 1968 Issued by the Federal Ministry of Information Lagos.” The Papal envoys, Conway and Rocheau, visited Nigeria and Biafra in December 1967 and February 1968 respectively and confirmed that the Nigerian crisis had no religious connotation. That remained the official Catholic stand.

⁸⁷ William A. Ajibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion: A Case Study of British Foreign Policy over the Nigerian Civil War* (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1978): 140.

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policy reversal came only after the visit of the Nigerian Protestant church leaders.

In the summer of 1968, a WCC conference was held in Uppsala, Sweden, and the Nigerian delegation, P.T. Odumosu and Bola Ige, got the Credential Committee to expunge the name "Biafra" from all accreditation papers and made sure that a meeting scheduled to discuss "Nigeria-Biafra" never held.⁸⁸ A similar move was also made in 1969 at the All Africa Conference of the Roman Catholic Bishops in Kampala, Uganda. In that meeting, Archbishop Aggey, the leader of the Nigerian delegation, "made sure that no political matter was introduced."⁸⁹ Given the overall yearning for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, these moves against the discussion of peace in international Christian gatherings appear rather puzzling. For Bola Ige, a trained legal practitioner, the opposition may be formalistic. The Biafran delegates and observers at the WCC meeting came as representatives of the Christian Council of Biafra, an organization that was not a registered member of the WCC. Once that fact had been established, it followed that the delegates were not legally qualified to be partners in any peace discussion of the world body.

For Archbishop Aggey, on the other hand, the opposition accrued from considerations far more significant than the dictates of protocol.⁹⁰ Given the general pro-Biafra sentiments of the Christian world at the time, the possibility was that any discussion on Nigeria-Biafra could lead to some sort of support for the break-away region. Archbishop Aggey knew more than anyone else what such a support would mean for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The call for a National Church in Nigeria was loud and recurrent. In June 1969, a meeting of the West Africa Committee of the Anglican Bishops was held at Takoradi, Ghana, just a few weeks

⁸⁸ Ige, *People, Politics*, p. 342.

⁸⁹ AGC: nige -02/1. "Aggey opposes Church Independent of Vatican," a newspaper cutting.

⁹⁰ The Biafran delegation to the conference, Archbishop Arinze and Bishop Godfrey Okoye, were officially invited to the gathering.

before the Catholic gathering in Kampala. During the Takoradi meeting the Nigeria-Biafra crisis was discussed. Afterwards the Nigerian church leaders who took part in the conference were castigated by the Christian Laity of Nigeria for the "tacit recognition" given to Biafra. The leader of the Lagos branch of the association, Rev. S.A. Osaba, referred to the call for a National Church of Nigeria as "joyfully welcomed by all Christians."⁹¹ An editorial in the *Morning Post* entitled "Voice of the Churches," said that what the Nigerian churches needed was "their Henry VIII to break foreign incursion disguised as religion."⁹² The first question posed to Archbishop Aggey by journalists at the airport on arrival from Kampala was whether he would support the idea of a National Church of Nigeria. In his response, he said that he preferred having his head cut off to severing his loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church.⁹³ The fact was that he had already saved his head in Kampala. Political talk on Nigeria-Biafra did take place in Kampala, but as Anthony Enahoro revealed, there was an agreement not to talk about the Pope's intervention publicly.⁹⁴

Incidentally, the idea of a National Church of Nigeria was conceived and spearheaded by Anthony Enahoro, the Federal Commissioner for Information. As a Roman Catholic, he was irked not only by Vatican intervention in the war, but also by what he and other Nigerian Catholics perceived as a preferential care for Igbo Catholics by the Pope and Western Church leaders. Above all, the religious war propaganda did not take their allegiance to Christianity into account. As Msgr. Rodhain, the President of Caritas Internationalis, found out during his visit to Nigeria in February 1968, most of the daily attacks on the Catholic Church and the Pope in the press came mainly from disaffected Catholics.⁹⁵ The propaganda rhetoric that the war was between

⁹¹ The *Morning Post*, 19 June, 1969.

⁹² Saturday, 26 July, 1969.

⁹³ AGC: nige -02/1. "Aggey opposes Church Independent of Vatican."

⁹⁴ *West Africa*, 9 August, 1969, p. 941.

⁹⁵ AGC: "Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Church Aid," Paris, 10 March 1969.

Muslims and Christians had made them irritable and susceptible to spurious interpretations of official Catholic pronouncements. We have seen how the Pope's revelation that he had sent relief materials into the enclave was interpreted as proof that he understood the conflict in Nigeria as between Christians and Muslims. A passing reference to "unbelievers" by Cardinal Heenan during a sermon in Westminster cathedral on 2 June during an interdenominational service on behalf of Biafra caused a huge uproar in Nigeria. Again it was Enahoro who raised the dust because, as he said, the Cardinal failed to appreciate the fact that he and several other cabinet members were Roman Catholics.⁹⁶

In the main, the civil war put God on trial in Nigeria and Biafra. The general perception among ordinary Biafrans was that God was on the side of Biafra. Many young people were heard saying that "if Biafra should lose this conflict we shall never come to Church again!"⁹⁷ The expectation was that since God was on the side of Biafra, he would never fail to come to the rescue of the new nation. Even Ojukwu himself was imbued with this thinking: "We cried out to God for help," he told a Caritas Official, "and the churches were the first to come to our aid. I see in that a sign that God will not allow his people to perish."⁹⁸ His famous Ahiara Declaration was ended in similar notes: "We believe that God, humanity and history are on our side, and that the Biafran revolution is indestructible and eternal." Thankfully, he conceded to God the very last words: "Oh God, not my will but Thine for ever."⁹⁹

On the other side of the conflict the people also prayed to the same God. In his radio message to the nation on 31 August, 1968,

⁹⁶ *New Nigerian*, Monday, 10 June, 1968.

⁹⁷ James Moynagh, "Some Comment on the Situation of the Church in the Present Situation," Calabar, 23 November, 1967.

⁹⁸ AGC: 187.1 biaf-11/1, Ludwig Stauffer, "Life Depends on the Airlift: Report on a Visit to Biafra," September 1968.

⁹⁹ Emeka Ojukwu, *The Ahiara Declaration: The Principle of the Biafran Revolution* (Geneva: Markpress, 1969): 54.

Gowon announced the decision of the FMG to pursue a military defeat of the rebels with every means at its disposal. "God," he said, "is with us. God will lead us to victory."¹⁰⁰

It is not always words of bitterness and condemnation that come out of Christian groups on both sides of the conflict. Occasionally, words of peace and reconciliation were raised in conformity with generally accepted Christian values. Worthy of mention on the Nigerian side was Provost F. O. Segun, a church leader who wrote extensively on what the church's attitude in the war should be. "We tend to forget," he said "that God is the Father of all men, including our enemies. We are therefore in danger of praying for victory for our army in a way which suggests that God should utterly forsake our opponents and throw all His strength on our side."¹⁰¹

Words of peace and reconciliation were also heard in Biafra, such as those that came out of the Trinity Theological College, Umuahia, one of the only two educational institutions that remained open throughout the war, the other being the Catholic Bigard Memorial Seminary. During a visit by WCC officials in November 1968, the President of the Student Body expressed a wish which was representative of the mind of the majority of Christians in Biafra. "We do remember our Christian brothers in Nigeria," he said, "and we pray that the time may come when we will be united as Christians; even though we may be politically different. We hope the time will come when we Christians in Biafra will also make our contribution to human compassion."¹⁰²

Conclusion

The application and success of the religious war propaganda in the Nigeria-Biafra war has emerged as one of the most spectacular

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *Rheinischer Merkur*, Friday, 13 September 1968.

¹⁰¹ "Is God on Our Side?", *Christian Concern*, p. 93.

¹⁰² AGC: 187.1 biaf- 04/2, 'World Council of Churches Visit to Biafra, November 9-14, 1968, A Diary.'

phenomena of the entire conflict. Ojukwu, the Biafran leader, had just one regret—Biafra was not able to make enough use of it.¹⁰³ According to him, there were two reasons for this constraint. Firstly, the religious propaganda pitted Christianity clearly against Islam. This could be said of the relationship between the East and a greater part of the North, but not of the rest of Nigeria where there was no clear-cut religious dichotomy. The second reason flows directly from the first, namely, the case of indecision and lack of co-operation from the Christians on the Nigerian side. In fact, the use of the religious propaganda produced the direct opposite of the anticipated result in this regard. It alienated the Nigerian Christians and made them unsympathetic to the Biafran cause.

The dictates of the war made the use of the religious propaganda inevitable. The Biafran Directorate of Propaganda could not use the pogrom to elicit the support of the entire Igbo nation for the war. A threat to their self-identity which their self-conscious Christian profession had become was the magic wand with which the propaganda outfit elicited the unflinching support of the masses for the war effort. From the advantage of hindsight, some people may disagree and disapprove. But, given the combined traumatic experience of the pogrom and a war of attrition, and given the most devastating man-made famine the world has ever known, the seemingly illogical religious war proposition becomes understandable. Innocuous as it may have seemed, it dominated political debate in Nigeria and polarised society throughout the war. Above all, it set the stage for the overarching dominance which religion has assumed in contemporary Nigerian national life.

¹⁰³ Personal Interview, Enugu, 21 November, 1998.

Traditional Religions and Reconciliation in Africa: Responding to the Challenges of Globalisation.

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The phenomenon of globalisation is self-evident and prevalent at the beginning of this 21st century. It extends its hold to every sphere of personal and collective life: political, economic, social, cultural and religious. Central to its definition and historical extension is the accumulation of capital.

Clearly economic interest, gain, and profit define and determine relationships of individuals and collectivity in globalization. It is in this relationship that worldwide transformations are perceived as a single force of subordinating production, sociopolitical institutions and cultural and spiritual traditions of African peoples to the one and only interest of the market and the accumulation of capital that increases daily.

Following this subordination, the worldwide spread of globalisation is comparable to a condensed, concentrated or a summary of forces that, in the continent, thanks to economic reforms, the appropriation or rather subjugation of the political sphere and the manipulation of the cultural and spiritual are life threatening: they threaten the life of individuals and collectivity, the life of nature and the immanence of the supernatural.

The matter is well known: according to authentic African tradition the sacred is always bonded with the profane; the one only the phenomenological base of the other. As institution of the sacred, religion, including African Traditional Religions (ATR) should not be a practice isolated within the margins of personal life and the journey of political institutions, economic mechanisms and cultural and religious renaissances. This anthropological and cultural inherence inscribes religions within the divided human world and makes it a commitment to the liberation of humans and

nature from the control of the forces of globalization. From this perspective reconciliation is only another name for liberation.

To define reconciliation and indicate the path it should take we divide this study into three parts. The first part tries to determine the anchor of ATR and the resources embedded in it for developing a programme of reconciliation in the continent. This centre is the human person. The destiny of humans is on trial thanks to globalization that splits up its unity and its simplicity into antagonistic components both in humans and in the surrounding world. As a result divided humans are made fragile, unable to be victorious in the combat over their destiny; humans are unable to establish unity within and around the self, to enable the forces of the light, the good and life to triumph over the forces of darkness, evil and death. Humans display therefore a break-up of radical harmony, a chronic absence of unity, and consequently an appeal for its recomposition.

The second part flows from the first. It is an attempt to show that human time is opportunity to resolve human distress. In temporality, ATR is a path chosen by humans to eradicate distress that challenges profoundly their being. Also religion in Africa is initiation to harmony; an apprenticeship in the unification of all the components of the person, notably the potentialities that the hope for its realization requires the exorcism of forces of darkness, of evil and the powers of death.

In this context, as we shall show in the third part, reconciliation is an agenda inherent to ATR (always understood in plural). To become an institution of life and ministry of unity of the human person, ATR is called upon to be an engagement for the unity of the human person and for the unity of the world, a reconciliation of contradictory tensions in the human person and in the world, a liberation from the grasp of the death-dealing forces of globalization. Following the train of ATR, reconciliation is a specific process that enables religious practices and the endogenous initiatives of globalization to become interdependent.

The Human Person, a simple Composite Reality:

Father Engelbert Mveng, of happy memory, carefully reminded us that “the point of departure of Black African thought (especially with regard to reflection on ATR) is not being as such. It is rather the experience of life, the life of living human Person. Here we come face to face not with ontology but with anthropology”.¹ It is the human person, in the final analysis, which is at the same time subject and object of thought in Black Africa. Consequently, to be subject, the human person appears as a being endowed with intelligence, a being that is rational. Therefore, depending on the inclination of his/her intelligence, He/She is neither an abstract concept nor an element in the tissue of cosmic determinisms.

According to Kasai (African) tradition², the person is « kabundi », or better still, is similar to « kabundi », a fox, constitutively defined by her sagacity, dexterity and intelligence. Reason, in the human person, is not an absolute curiosity. It is rather at the heart of the din and racket of the contemporary world: relative and open to interiority, indeed to human destiny, consciousness, desires, will, soul, vocation, which, in some way, it happens to be the memory; open to those acts that concretely fulfil it. Therefore, reason’s curiosity concerns not only interiority but also exteriority; it concerns the temporal dimensions of the human person.

Hence, time becomes one of the places to understand the human condition. Time can be defined as totality of acts, or rather a series of acts, events, initiatives, enterprises. In brief time is Malu³: they punctuate the march of the human person and design the itinerary of his/her constitution as a human person. These acts are not simply chronological instants. They are, up to the least

¹ E. MVENG, *L’Afrique dans l’Eglise. Paroles d’un croyant*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1985, p.10

² Kasai region is in central Democratic Republic of the Congo.

³ The term ‘malu’ comes from Ciluba, language of the Kasai ; it signifies acts, facts, initiatives, events, enterprises, problems, traditions, etc.

chronological point, moments, stages and operations of personal and communal flourishing of the human being⁴. In other words, time is not an instant turned into fetish, whose idolatrous extension is a story of enslavement; forcefully holding in captivity the vital force of individuals and the projects of collectivities within the demands of its power; bringing about the renewal of a regime or mental and institutional complex that telescopes or blocks everyone uniformly within its chronolatric egoism, its idolatrous avarice and the interiorization of the human person and unification of peoples.⁵

All in all, "...time enters... into the definition of the human being, needless to say, 'as the index of his/her weakness, (ageing), his/her condition as creature, but also and principally as essential coordinate of his/her existence in the world'".⁶ "The time of humans inaugurates a process through which the human being constructs his/her becoming by creating and organizing relationship to the self, the world and to all reality. It is (the human wish at work to achieve fullness and in travail for the creation of the private space and objective of its publicity). It is lived as evacuation of non-being, establishment of order, the anticipation of a self and a fullness ceaselessly postponed".⁷

There is more. Time is not, as one sees it, an absolute grandeur, self-defining by and for itself. Its moments, its instants, its episodes require for their advent, their efficacy, the participation of the body. Temporality always evokes corporeality. To be in time is indissociably and simultaneously to have a body and vice versa.

⁴ M.MALU Nyimi, « Le mariage coutumier dans la spiritualité africaine. La pensée de François Marie Lufuluabo et ses prolongements théologiques », dans R. BURGRAEVE, K. DEMASURE, M. FOKET, Ph. WEBER, (ed.), *Marriage-Divorce – Remariage. Challenges and Perspectives for Christians/ Mariage – divorce – remariage. Défis et perspectives chrétiennes*, (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia LVIII), Leuven- Paris- Dudley, MA, Peeters, 2007, p. 277

⁵ See, M. MALU Nyimi, *Inversion culturelle et déplacement de la pratique chrétienne africaine. Préface à une théologie périphérique*, (KTC 24), Kampen, Kok, 1994, p.115

⁶ Ibid., p.111

⁷ Ibid., p.24

There is no growth or motion towards realizing human destiny in time and towards unification of peoples without corporeal engagement.

Thus, body in time, is an organ of articulating these instants, these historical episodes and the unification of individual subjects. In the articulation and unification, the body is no longer an insulating organ. It is rather like a bridge through which human subjects become interdependent, linked one to another and put on the space of their existence. It is like the thread that sews all humans together, the tissue in which they are enveloped.

Observation reveals indeed that the body is made of pores. Pores are like multiple orifices through which the body becomes permeable, facilitating the effectiveness of its action, the actuation of human destiny, open to the rhythms and forces of the world, making itself world, space and cosmos. Body is thus the biological form of space. Therefore to have body is without doubt to be in time, and also to be in the world. Body enables time to be united with the cosmos. "...In African anthropology, the corporeal element is the point of the articulation of the human person to other dimensions of its essential structure: the absolute, the community and the cosmos. For the African, the body is a constitutive element of (his/her) definition...an indissoluble knot of relationships—human, social, cosmic and divine. The body ... appears not only as the point of the objective emergence of the interiority of the human person and the specific consciousness of his/her personality, of his cultural autonomy and his/her responsibility as historical being. It is perhaps the normative paradigm of the universe—economic, social, ecological and psychological. Corporeality appears to be the criterion for the truth of determinations of the historical development of human life that have ecological, economic, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual dimensions.⁸

⁸ M. MALU Nyimi, *Ibid.*, p.157-158

This course is particularly significant. It shows, we dare to hope, that understanding, that in itself is relative, is an attentive observation of time and body, and finally of the person in them. Also body and time are nothing but operations of human action. They are also the dwelling of the presence of human destiny that has life as its constitutive horizon.

In the light of African anthropology, life is at the centre of human condition and, in short, of existence, of destiny, of body-space and time. In addition, life is not "en soi" (solitary self) placed at the core of the human condition. It is the defined, defining and definitive essence of human existence. It is the personal and final goal of the human being. It is the ever incomplete end of its evolution. "This evolution", E. Mveng wrote, "is unlike the Greek degradation and fall... It does not separate from Nous to fall, passing through Logos and Psyche, into the chaos of Hyle. On the contrary, it is a forward march, ascension, passion, death and resurrection".⁹ It is "an assiduous search, an ordeal, always on course, always undertaken anew and never completed."¹⁰ Here, evolution is fecundation, birth, growth and rebirth of life whose final though provisional end is the emergence of the living Human, as human person. Life fundamentally defines the human person that has arrived at his/her personal stature. It is its fundamental aim.

It is in the mirror of this evolution that life is affirmed, as far as its personal state, as gift, and, consequently, as presence of the giver. Black African cosmologies are unanimous and elaborate in describing the prodigious details of the origin of human life.¹¹

⁹ E.MVENG, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise. Paroles d'un croyant*, p.11

¹⁰ O.BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain. Problème des fondements*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1981, p.586

¹¹ See, FU-KIAU Bunsenki kia Kimbwandende, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo. Principles of Live & Living*, Brooklyn, NY, 2001, p.17-43, L.MAGESA, *African Religion. The Oral Tradition of Abundant Life*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1997, p.36-39, CH.A. DIOP, *Civilization or Barbarism. An Authentic Anthropology*, Brooklyn, NY, Lawrence Hill Books, 1991, p.310-326; E.MVENG, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise. Paroles d'un croyant*, Paris, L'Harmattan,

Here, life has its source in primordial “emptiness”, “non-being”¹² whose principle, energy, and wave was the base of the original “big bang”, the primitive explosion from which arose the cosmos, the planets, and notably the earth where humans are the creature of privilege.¹³

Life thus draws its source from “Matter”. Since “Matter” holds in itself the principle of its being, the energy of its evolution and the power of its rebirth, it was raised to the rank of deity. Cheikh Anta Diop makes a salient and interesting observation on this point:

Up to this point, the Egyptian « cosmogony » is materialistic in essence, for it is professing a materialistic faith when postulating the existence of an uncreated eternal matter, excluding nothingness and containing its own principle of evolution as intrinsic property. This materialistic component of Egyptian thought will prevail among the Greek and Latin Atomists (Democretus, Epicurius and Lucretius). But, with the appearance of the demiurge, RA, Egyptian cosmogony takes a new direction with the introduction of an idealist component: RA achieves

1985, p.9 ; O.BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain. Problème des fondements*, p.551

¹² In African cosmology « emptiness » and « non-being » always imply uncreated matter though non organised. Listen to CH.A.Diop, “According to these systems, the universe was not created ex nihilo, on a given day ; but there has always existed an uncreated matter, without a beginning or an end (the apeiron, without limit and without determinations, of Anaximander, Hesiod, etc; this chaotic matter was, in origin, the equivalent of non-being, because of the sole fact that it was unorganized: thus, non-being is not, here, the equivalent of nothingness, from which would rise, no one knows how, the matter that would be the substance of the universe. This chaotic matter contained at the archetypal state (Plato) all the essences of the body of the future beings that, one day, would be called into existence”, CH.A. DIOP, *Civilization or Barbarism. An Authentic Anthropology*, p.310

¹³ See FU-KIAU Bunseki kia Kumbwandende, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo*; and also E.MVENG, *l’Afrique dans l’Eglise*, p. 10

creation through the word (Islam and Judeo-Christian Religions), the Logos (Heraclitus), the Spirit (the objective idealism of Hegel). As soon as RA conceives things, they emerge into existence¹⁴

Precisely in African cosmology, “this primordial matter, the *Nous* or the “primordial waters” was elevated to the level of divinity (called *NUN* in Egyptian cosmology). Thus, from the start, each principle of explanation of the universe is doubled by a divinity, and as philosophical thought developed in Egypt, and more particularly in Greece (materialistic School), the later replaced the former”¹⁵

In this perspective, to be product of matter, life, in African cosmology, is not less the work of God. It is God’s gift to humans. It is enriched with material principle doubled with supernatural principle. Life is therefore not a notion, even simple or abstract. In African anthropology, it is not a dispensable attribute of the human person and the world. It is constitutive of its essence as created being, as received. It is therefore a gift. God is the parent. That explains why, in the human person, it is a seed, force, energy, power, a divinely infused virtue, in the fibres of the biophysical condition of the human being. “Life is in the human person a concrete reality. It is a force, an energy whose intensity and vitality is required for individuation.”¹⁶ It is incorrect to consider it as static or a fixed reality. It is dynamic. In this wise, and to the benefit of its personal becoming, it embodies an imperative for action, for engagement, an ethic of responsibility.

¹⁴ CH. A. DIOP, *Civilization or Barbarism. An authentic Anthropology*, o.c., p.311

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ M.MALU Nyimi, « Le mariage coutumier dans la spiritualité africaine. » p.278 ; on principle of individuation in African philosophy see, R.BASTIDE, « Le principe d’individuation (Contribution à la philosophie africaine) », dans *La notion de personne en Afrique Noire*, (Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 544), Paris, Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1981, p.33-43

The responsibility is lived in action. It is in praxis that life appears as “breath”, as “force”.¹⁷ Therefore it is the virtue, energy, power, promise, and hope in the human person.¹⁸ Besides, the being living in hope is something other than the passive docility in the present world, resignation, fatality to the virtual state of life, to its indetermination. Hope implies always and imperatively the advent of its object. In principle, it is therefore an ontological challenge to all ordeals, the screens to its dawn, especially death. Indeed, following the logic of promise, death is not death, but a transition to a new dawn of being.

Therefore, “life holds death at a distance... Death is only a march past, true enough a hard passage towards ‘life that endures’”¹⁹. “And so”, as O Bimwenyi-Kweshi underlines, “far from constituting a catastrophe by itself, the tears and the ordeals arise from ‘the initiation tunnel’, that is the totality of sub-solar residence, before the advent of life that is ‘durable’”.²⁰ In the promise, life expresses itself as desire in search of appeasement, thirst in labour of being slaked, an appetite on the way to beatific satisfaction. Existence is under the sign of promise, as “an immense wish, a vehement desire to live fully without ever ceasing to live”.²¹

O Bimwenyi-Kweshi has, on this point, particularly dense and limpid pages; highly significant texts that one cannot resist quoting integrally:

Therefore the brief time slot of existence that runs between the initial smile and the final tears is studded with traps, punctuated with ordeals and temptations of all sorts, of

¹⁷ TSHIBANGU T., *Le propos d'une théologie africaine*, Kinshasa, Presses Universitaires du Zaïre, 1974, p.18, aussi Pl. TEMPELS, *Bantu Philosophy*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1959, p.30

¹⁸ O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*, p. 594

¹⁹ Ibid., p.596.

²⁰ Ibid., p.594

²¹ Ibid.,

which pessimistic despair is not the least. Nevertheless, astonishing and admirable reality, muntu did not yield to it. He remained allergic to discouragement, to despair despite the ordeals that arose from her sociocultural situation, epidemics, not forgetting innumerable historical reverses...occasioned by sparks that follow the intermingling of peoples of the planet. The coalition of forces of death did not wipe away his smile, his joie de vivre. In the shadows that he traversed since centuries, muntu is the smile of the world.²²

At the end of his/her incomplete evolution, life appears as a total holistic reality. "It is not simply material force; it is total energy that integrates the polyvalent forces, moving from physical integrity, to chance and moral integrity".²³ Life is not only virtual in humans. It is also formal when it is found in humans and animals; it is analogical where it reproduces in things, even in inanimate things, especially in plants, green and dry, and in minerals.²⁴ Prof V. Mulago writes:

Life that is our subject is integral life, individual in so far as received by each existent, communal and collective in so far as participated in the same and unique source....It is neither the life of the sentient nor of thinking beings. It is also not the diverse and multicoloured life one finds in journals and modern novels. It is life in all its simplicity and essence. It is life as participated in and received from 'power', that addresses power, and is seized by power and as it seizes the power. That kind of life is not destroyed by death, even though the latter offers it the possibility to change its

²² Ibid. p.593,

²³ BOUBOU HAMA et J. KI-ZERBO, « Place de l'histoire dans la société africaine », dans J.KI-ZERBO (dir.), *Histoire générale de l'Afrique*, Paris, Jeune Afrique, Stock, UNESCO, 1980, p.73

²⁴ FR. M. LUFULUABO, Mentalité religieuse africaine et christianisme: convergences et divergences, dans *Revue du Clergé Africain*, 23 (1967), P.319

condition. This life does not follow a straight line; rather it is in the form of a circumference; in other words from life to death there is no interruption but continuation. It has got nothing to do with life that is exclusively corporeal or exclusively spiritual; rather it is life that is "totally human". It is the whole life of a being, the integrity of being. This integrity of being includes its appurtenances: patrimony, background, etc. This is because for the African, the human person is never conceived shed of all appurtenances.²⁵

Finally, it is in life that the human being discovers the diversity of his/her dimensions. Personal individuation of life is naturally through actions, through works. These are esteemed as impulses, as steps, as staircases for ascension, for increase, fulfilment and personal completion of life. In action, the human person is proven as "a pilgrim, always on the way, towards a fascinating fullness always postponed".²⁶ The human person becomes progress towards the horizon of his/her existence which is life, to become a champion, a hero called upon to overcome the obstacles erected on the way to the conquest of life, to crush the forces of darkness, of evil and of death, so as to realize the victory by the forces of light, of the good and of life.

It is also in action that the human person discovers the incapacity to realise all alone, in solitude, the program of life, his/her destiny. This precariousness appears as an opportunity that forces the human person into his/her "being-to be-being-with"; in other words a knot of relationships, a being of alliance, of marriage, of solidarity, of participation and of community.²⁷ In action, the

²⁵ V. MULAGO, « Eléments fondamentaux de la religion africaine, dans Religions Africaines et Christianisme. » Colloque international de Kinshasa, 9-14 janvier 1978. I., Kinshasa, Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1978I, p.44-45

²⁶ O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*, p.597

²⁷ See FR. M. LUFULUABO, « Mentalité religieuse africaine et christianisme : convergences et divergences, » p.320 ; V.MULAGO, *Un visage africain du*

human person, in order to be a personal being, is nonetheless a communitarian being, a social being. "The individual is tied to and depends on the community, but is not lost in it", Prof V. Mulago loves to stress. "The vital gift is never cut off from its source; all the canals through which it is transported always exercise their influence on it. Individual life is neither conceived nor lived except as attached to the source and the channels through which it came. This life of the individual is grasped only as participated."²⁸

As O. Bimweny-Kweshi wrote, "in accordance with ... relationship (to the community), muntu is member, mwena, 'son of...'. He/she lives-with. It is not *Cyenda nkaya*, a solitary walker without friends, without links; nor *Cysa-nkaya*, a misanthrope 'living alone', at the margins of society. As team mate and intermediary (relay-being); life for her is life-with-others, connected to the life circuit whose ultimate home is God".²⁹ It is within community, i.e. the couple, family, clan, nation, etc., that the human becomes a person, draws strength and becomes, with others, truly capable of surmounting all the psychological and sociological obstacles to the achievement of the promise of life. Nevertheless, one must lift the ambiguity that risks taking root: the community does not destroy individuality in the human person. "...the person, far from being thought as absorbed by his/her group (...) is rather one instance, a source of meaning, a place for the experience of the autonomy of speech, a takeoff point for action."³⁰

Christianisme. L'Union vitale bantu face à l'unité vitale ecclésiale, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1965, p.117-129, ID., *Eléments fondamentaux de la religion africaine*, dans *Religions Africaines et Christianisme*. », p.44-51

²⁸ V. MULAGO, *Un visage africain du christianisme. L'union vitale bantu face à l'unité ecclésiale*, p.119

²⁹ O.BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*., p.608

³⁰ BUAKASA Tulu kia Mpansu, « L'impact de la religion africaine sur l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui. Latence et Patience, » dans *Religions Africaines et Christianisme*. Colloque international de Kinshasa. 9-14 janvier 1978. 2., Kinshasa, Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1979, p. 23

The community is here responsible for “communion”.³¹ Communion is a process entirely ruled by love. Such is marriage; in love there is no restrictive union, reductive of difference and the alterity of the other as much as the increase (growth) of the lover and the beloved. It is rather a covenant whose accomplishment is at the same time the self fulfilment and accession of the other. They are fecund nuptials in which lovers generate, assume themselves in their otherness, in their consciousness, realize the spiritual and carnal unity that makes the one the resemblance of or the “same” of the other. It is that by which the human person recapitulates in his/her person the allies of life, of his life and assumes the different vital forces of the visible and invisible world.

Recapitulation is not coercion as it were exercised from outside, in the total subordination of things and being. It is felt as a call through which the human person arouses through the mediation of word, of speech, existent things and beings. According to African tradition, the human person is a being endowed with eloquence. S/he is master of speech. His/her speech is a “calling” and renovation³². From indistinctiveness he/she enables things to appear as ordered, names them, brings their creation to fulfilment and makes them available. “Through the power of naming, the human person calls things into a new existence in relationship to himself. He wakens in them the latent parcel of the primordial word; and by this awakening, by this type of ‘resurrection’, he animates all things with the vibratory rhythm inherent in the word.”³³ Recapitulation listens to things and beings and elevates them to the pitch of the human, enabling them to become comparable partners of the human being.

The human person is rightly said to be a microcosm in the bosom of the macrocosm; the universe in miniature, the universe synthesized, the rendezvous of all vital forces, ‘a relay-being’, grain of the universe, coryphaeus of the dance of being, an

³¹ E.MVENG, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise. Paroles d'un croyant*, p.14

³² O.BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*, p.602

³³ Ibid.

ornament, jewel of the universe, confluence or juncture of all beings.³⁴ She is guarantor of the equilibrium of the external world, indeed of the cosmos; the axis called to preserve multiplicity lest it collapses into chaos, Lord-of-all-things.³⁵

In light of the recapitulation, the assimilation, appropriation—in other words of communion and love—the human being appears to us as a simple compound, better still an organic simplicity. Her person is a complexity. She holds, besides her destiny, the invisible world made by God, ancestors, spirits, forces of the earth and the visible world; the human world, the animal world, plant world and even the world of inorganic beings.³⁶ “The person is not thus a frozen reality. She is living, ceaselessly becoming, acquiring ever new determinations, susceptible—beyond a certain critical threshold—of modifying the internal and social configuration of muntu, whose novel dimensions thus manifested give rise to a new name”.³⁷ “Situated at the heart of the universe, muntu displays the self as bridge of the world, the revolving plaque of all these relationships, the place of ‘perichoresis’ of beings”.³⁸ “(Also, muntu) (has) consciousness of being synchronically team player, a member that all can count on; and, diachronically a relay-being, a terminal bud that recapitulates in the self the vital current coming from God through ancestors, knowing very well that he/she is responsible, on her part, for the transmission of this life and the name of the fathers”.³⁹

Poets have rivalled one another in eloquence over this point. “Flesh of the flesh of the world”, “pores of all breaths of the world making possible the confluence of all beings in the great cosmic rhythm, presiding over a type of cosmic liturgy. According to some Black African traditions, muntu makes possible the confluence of beings not only through speech, as he speaks and listens to them,

³⁴ Ibid., p.598-609

³⁵ Ibid., p. 598-603

³⁶ V. MULAGO, « *Éléments fondamentaux de la religion africaine*, », p.48-49

³⁷ O.BIMWENY Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*. p.596

³⁸ Ibid., p.598.

³⁹ Ibid., p.599

gives them names and leads their dance, but also already by his constitution indeed as a being, for he is made as the 'rendezvous of all the forces', as the 'synthesis of all things'".⁴⁰ Muntu is one, but his/her unity is complex. She is made of many elements, "some fundamental, others supplementary, some permanent, others provisional or periodic; some capable of going away or leaving (coming off), others capable of coming (entering); some relative to the function of willing (I, me), others related to the function of determination"⁴¹.

These forces, in the human person, are thus totally unified. The unification is neither juxtaposition, nor superposition of the components of the human person; it is consubstantial, conjunction, harmonious circularity as love desires. It is in the struggle for communion, for unity, for harmony, and for equilibrium in the human person and around him/her that one must insert oneself to better understand and define African religion and the perspective of reconciliation it embodies.

African religion, initiation into unity:

Life entails in ATR, in view of its personal advent, a demand for the unification of the components of the human being. There lies also the mission of the human person. It consists in unifying his/her interior world, assuring within the self the victory of the powers of life over the forces of death, assuring the same on the socio-cosmic level, "for, in general, it is the split human person that divides the world".⁴² Unity appears as an essential precondition for the personal development of life.

However, we already said that the components are, to the benefit of their elevation to the diapason of the person, "personal or

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.603

⁴¹ BUAKASA Tulu kia Mpansu, « L'impact de la religion africaine sur l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui », p. 23

⁴² O. BIMWENYI Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain*. p.595

personified” beings whose will to power leads at times and perhaps often to individual egoism and collective avarice. These anti-values have always been present in African civilizations as negative forces of disintegration, splitting the unity of the human person, the unity of the collectivity and the unity of the world. Far from being partners, allies of life, they transform into forces of darkness and death, real threats to individual and collective lives. Minerals, plants, animals, other humans, institutions often appear in the journey of the human being as coalitions of forces of death fighting the forces of life, of human life. Even God remains silent. God’s silence is interpreted as “avarice” that makes God indifferent to the appeals of threatened life, even makes God party to life in distress.⁴³

In this context, human existence is an urgent call to fill in this profound lack of communion, call to unity in order to reach fulfilled life; it is therefore a demand (requirement) of reconciliation of the different psychological, sociological, ecological and metaphysical components of the human person.

The response to the appeal is not only the concern of individuals. It is also the basis of the origin of institutions, of religions in particular. Religions, including ATR, are in effect indissociable from the destiny of individuals and the historical itinerary of peoples. They need to be understood as responses to the multiple challenges of their soul and their historical consciousness. They are spiritualities that peoples forged that are most suitable to their sensibility, their genius and their challenges. They are like mirrors and lights of our personal and collective lives.⁴⁴ As L.V.

⁴³ Ibid., p.572

⁴⁴ Listen to Stewart, “Orisha traditions illustrate that religion is ultimately a way of life and offers humans tools for managing life. To manage life well requires mastering the self. Self-mastery is facilitated by the development of *iwa pele* (gentle and noble character) and acceptance of one’s *ita* (life purpose). By living in accordance with the collective wisdom of the ancestors and the ethical teachings of the tradition (acquired through divination and experience), Orisha devotees negotiate personal and communal life with the aim of overcoming misfortune, disease, and oppression in the here and now life. Living a satisfying

Thomas wrote, "as symbolic system, religion is first of all an intellectual response to existential anxiety [estrangement]" (whose) "rituals and ...beliefs are rooted in the social order."⁴⁵ They are therefore for individuals and collectivity springboards of real responsibilities.

Religion is thus not an isolated phenomenon. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, it is bound to the history of human communities. This history appears as "work" facilitating the emergence of collectivity into civilisation and individuals into becoming human. It is therefore work, it seems to me, or to be more precise, the mode of production that is the privileged place for understanding the profile of individuals, the morphology and the signification of their institutions, including religious institutions⁴⁶. Labour is without doubt the production of things, of wealth. It is more than ever the production of the human being who makes the self a human person through producing things. Religions would be institutions for the benefit of the labour of the production of humans and their universe. Work is therefore in religion, multidimensional. It is physical, symbolic, spiritual, and even mystifying, notably through its relation to death, perceived at the end of a fulfilled terrestrial life as a passage, an emergence from the present visible world to enter into the invisible world.⁴⁷

More still; production in Africa is performed through numerous and different activities, notably agriculture, fishing, livestock, metallurgy, art, etc. They are integral part of the African mode of production. What however appears specific to this mode

and good fortune with others is encouraged by the promise of ancestor hood and reincarnation in the life to come" D.M STEWART, "Orisha Traditions in the West", in M. DE LA TORRE (ed.), *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, Baylor University Press, p.244-245

⁴⁵ L.V.THOMAS, « La religion négro-africaine dans son essence et ses manifestations, » dans *Religions Africaines et Christianisme*. Colloque international de Kinshasa. 9-14 janvier 1978. I. *Cahiers des Religions Africaines* XI (1978) ns 21-22, p. 82

⁴⁶ Voir, TSHIBANGU, T., *Le propos d'une théologie africaine*, p.19

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.32

of production is that while remaining human activity, production is not a surgery, an operation whereby through violence humans attempt to pillage the wealth and resources of the earth. On the contrary, production is perceived and lived as recognition of human existence, human gratitude towards the land, for the goods thus produced are the gift of the earth to her sons and daughters that humans beings are. More precisely, production is, in its African mode and as related to the land, gratitude towards the Principle, the Spirit who created the universe and therefore the planet earth. In this sense, production is linked to religion. It happens always in an environment, in a religious context.

Under this connection, producing, through human effort, is indeed prayer, thanksgiving to the earth, and finally prayer to the "Father" to provide for his sons and daughters the goods that are indispensable for their existence. One understands hence that the means of production are, besides manufactured tools, symbols, speech, rites and worship. That explains why African civilization is a history "richer in symbols than in tools and technology, more oriented towards being than having, more sensitive to accumulating humans than in market capitalization of goods".⁴⁸

Labour requires obedience to the land. It is work of constructing harmony between humans and the earth, with fellow humans, with nature, with spirits and with God. On the whole, production remains a work of men and women in this world. It is furthermore, in the same line, a homage rendered to the earth and to God, who is the first agent. Labour in the mode of African production is therefore, without doubt, an initiative of humans and therefore a work of God, God's gift.

It is through labour that humans, and religions along with them, assume the responsibility of unification, of combining the different components of the human person and thus fortify humans in the combat for the conquest of life. Therefore, African mysticism is deployed in awareness of the forces that threaten life and its

⁴⁸ L.V. THOMAS, *La religion africaine dans son essence et ses manifestations*, p.76

personal unity against which humans are obliged to protect themselves. These forces are extrinsic: witchcraft, fate, curses, political oppression, economic exploitation, ideological paternalism. They are also intrinsic: humans themselves through egoism, avarice, transgression of interdicts, non-observance of taboos; brief, transgression of the moral law.

Following work, the spiritual is perceived as being received, given, and begotten. Its being is acknowledgment. It is, consequently, made up of beliefs, allegiances to visible and invisible hierarchies that engendered it. Thus, religions are indissociable from the human condition, from the radical lack that the universe echoes. They are beliefs or the totality of beliefs and cult given to a Power or a Supreme Being that makes humans to be through the diverse mediations from the world of ancestors, spirits, parents or the community.⁴⁹ They are, according to critics, "belief in two worlds, visible and invisible, belief in the communal and hierarchical character of these two worlds, belief in the interaction between the two worlds, transcendence not impeding immanence, belief in a Supreme Being, creator and father of all that exist".⁵⁰

One finds in religions in condensed way the characteristic traits of African culture. According to Elungu Pene Elungu, the essentials of our wisdom and traditional religions (of African culture) can be schematized in the following traits:

"the primacy of the omnipresence of life as force and link;
The anthropovitalism of the human person, of the society that apprehends the universe, that acts on it, without ever coming out of them nor never able to be separated from them;
the co-vitalism or connaturalism of all society based on the clan and the whole culture that is linked to it;

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.29

⁵⁰ T.TSHIBANGU, « L'Afrique noire et le christianisme, », p.30, citant V.MULAGO, *La religion traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde*, (Bibliothèque du CERA), Kinshasa, Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1973, p.13

the eminently ethical, metaphysical and religious character of these cultures where the religious order, the natural order and the social order correspond in the unity of a cosmogonic and theogonic system⁵¹.

This ensemble is constantly renewed so that individuals and collectivities face up to new challenges.

Mystical life is a human experience. On this note, its understanding is indissociable from the comprehension of the person, of the mystic. Indeed, in the economy of life, the human person is not pure nature. He/she fulfils the self always as a human person. The person is defined as human through his/her vocation, through his/her destiny. Consciousness shows precisely that destiny is not a given, something already constructed once and for all, constituted for and by the human person. It is a task whose relentless accomplishment makes the human person a being on the way, a journey towards fulfilment, perfection, successful and fullness of life. This has been sufficiently repeated.⁵²

Fullness appears like a promise and poses the "primal originary precariousness", the "radical lack",⁵³ as the constitutive faculty of the situation, of the human condition. Fullness nevertheless reveals that chaos has not the last word in human destiny. It is as one reads from the profound need in humans for order, harmony, security, life and unification of forces of life against forces of death, forces of light against forces of darkness. It makes the human person, a being profoundly anxious, an interrogation taken up ceaselessly, an existential enigma, a summary of contradictions and paradoxes, conflicts and vicissitudes.

⁵¹ ELUNGU Pene Elungu, « Religions africaines et philosophie, » in *Religions Africaines et Christianisme*, p.96

⁵² A. NGINDU Mushete, « Les défis de la vie consacrée inculturée, dans Inculturation de la vie consacrée en Afrique à l'aube du troisième millénaire. » Actes du cinquième colloque international, Kinshasa, Carmel-Afrique, 1988, p.221-222

⁵³ T. TSHIBANGU (Mgr), « L'Afrique noire et le christianisme », p.29

It is here that African religions appear particularly precious. They are without doubt, as L.V. Thomas wrote, "one of the multiple routes that, for centuries, 'man' borrowed to try and respond to fundamental interrogations which, all time, preside over his life".⁵⁴ They are thus rightly sanctuaries, groves of meaning, of the direction of existence. It is thus that rituals, worship, symbols, myths have, it is said, initiatory and mystagogic value. It introduces adepts to be conscious of their soul, of their personality, of their awareness of God.⁵⁵ Initiation is here a true 'voyage', a 'pilgrimage' at the end of which the pilgrim, the adept emerges onto the encounter and communion with his/her divine model, with the God of his/her belief and of his/her history.

It is in encounter and communion that the African believer is called to live and witness to the mystical experience. In encounter and communion, mystical experience appears as a marriage, the wedding of the adept with the God that chose and seduced him/her. This marriage is like a walk towards fecundation that places the adept beside the "groom", makes him/her royal as the latter, confers on him/her the prerogatives of commandment,⁵⁶ raise him/her to the diapason of his authority: "there is (in initiation, that is in encounter and communion) the profoundly lived sentiment of participation in the existence of a God without partners (without mediations), interiorly felt as unique, immense, hidden, rich, 'burning', just and good; to have an experience of God (especially in possession) is in a sense "initiation and the prolongation of the life of this God itself".⁵⁷

For the faithful, this union is like a 'mounting' that makes him/her a personal, primary and elementary cathedral, the sacristy, the dwelling place, one could say the grove of his/her God. The

⁵⁴ L.V. THOMAS et R.LUNEAU, *La terre africaine et ses religions. Traditions et changements*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1975, p.10

⁵⁵ Voir, L.MAGESA, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1997, p.36-37

⁵⁶ L.V. THOMAS et R.LUNEAU, *La terre africaine et ses religions*, p.175

⁵⁷ *Ib.*, p.180.

unity is not only spiritual; it involves the totality of the person of the faithful. It is corporeal and cosmic; the body is biological form of the universe.⁵⁸ Indeed, "the human person is in the world and is one with the world. In fact, the human relationship with the geographical and biological context is not oppositional by nature. Far from separating from the environment, humans coincide with it, name and animate it. The world is not a strange spectacle or a system of perception; it is rather a complex of explanatory signs or symbols and a creator of verbal forms; better still, it defines itself as the personification of symbol. This complex reality-human-world, the human that occupies in the world a place of privilege, ends in the hominisation of the universe...leads to the antipode of naturism."⁵⁹

Altogether, "(mystical life) is (in African culture, in ATR) first of all communion with the divine. The communion implies, in the opinion of Prof D. Ngondo Dishone Kalala, that one feels one with the other, it calls even to unity. The presence of one to the other ends in communication not only of thought and sentiments... but also of destiny/fate, designs, wills, primarily of the divine nature. It is an encounter that invites a coming out of the self to move towards the other, beyond all mediation, to the point of living immediate, intense, indeed intimate communion with this other or Other. This communion constitutes an experience of the divine permitting the knowledge or *savoir* made possible by the initiative that comes from elsewhere. It is also identification with the other in its life and its dramatic death. This identification sends humans back to reproduce in life, the life of the hero."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ M. MALU Nyimi, *Inversion culturelle et déplacement de la pratique chrétienne africaine*. p.30-43

⁵⁹ L.V. THOMAS, « La religion negro-africaine dans son essence et ses manifestations », dans *Religions Africaines et Christianisme*. I. Colloque international de Kinshasa, 9-14 janvier 1978, Kinshasa, Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1979, p.77

⁶⁰ D. NGONDO Dishono Kalala, *Mystique africaine et mystique de Saint Jean de la Croix. Relecture du colloque international de Kinshasa*. Du 13 au 16 janvier 1992, Kinshasa, Baobab, 2002, p.80

In other words, the mystical life is better presented in the language of valour associated with spirituality. Listen to Mveng: "The amorous encounter between lovers is a cosmic celebration of the soul of shadows of the night (forces of darkness, powers of death, of evil), of the prison of all its 'ecological' environment (house, castle, secret staircases), of its social environment ('no one saw me'), cosmic environment (dark night, starry sky); it is a veritable initiatory birth where from the bosom of darkness and night (death), the soul is slowly born for the dawn, to the light brighter than the noonday sun. It is in this dazzle that the Beloved encounters the awaiting Lover that she already knew in her heart. It is the fusion of the Loved-One and the Lover, each transformed in the other. Then the mystery of the Blessedness of the pure in heart shines forth; when the Beloved holds the Lover tightly to her heart that is kept for Him Alone. Plunged into the slumber of Love, "asleep on his heart, I knew him, fanning him with cedar fans! '...Nature plunged into the nuptial mystery, seems to be falling asleep slowly, murmuring a lullaby of lazy breeze and perfumed Petals'"⁶¹.

Mystical experience is not just the immanent initiative of a transcendent God but also and in particular within the initiative of God Himself, the action of the human person, self-transforming and self-humanising." One notes in these conditions that (mystical experience) is in the end ... a kind of humanism which, taking off from the human person to return there, captures in its track all that is not himself and which surpasses him. This humanism is the basis of individual and social ethics whose normal flourishing finds fulfilment in the mystical life. Moral life and mystical life, these two aspects of African spirituality give it its true dimensions. They are, so to say, the supreme end of the soul of Black folks, the objective towards which the individual tends with all powers,

⁶¹ E.MVENG, « La voie initiatique de Saint Jean de la Croix », dans D. ZUAZUA (dir.), *La mystique africaine. Actes du colloque international à l'occasion du IVème centenaire de la mort de Saint Jean de la Croix*, Kinshasa, Baobab, 1993, p.333

because he or she does not feel that her perfection realized and consummated unless s/he reaches self mastery and surpasses herself through the deity, indeed mastering the deity herself".⁶²

This God that comes to appease the disquiet of the mystic, cushion the passion and fill up his/her "radical lack" has the face circumscribed by the adept. It is the God of his/her experience and destiny, the God of his/her ancestors. S/he feels it and perceives it as the summit of the hierarchy of the universe, the 'Force', the first and ultimate power that gives life; God the Creator and Sustainer, the Holy One.⁶³ One cannot but insist on this point: "God is perceived as the 'Great Ancestor', first founder and genitor, the giver of life, the power that inheres in all that is. God is the primordial initiator of ways and customs of peoples, of their tradition."⁶⁴ In the mystical life of Africans, "God is known and honoured as the 'Great Ancestor', Ukulunkulu (Zulu), Omukama (Ganda), Nyame (Akan), Olodumare (Yoruba), Leve (Mende), etc."⁶⁵ God is, in African mysticism, that Spirit, the Force that henceforth delivers from slavery to the unconscious powers and the prisons of the African milieu. God is the Beloved whose ecstasy is indissociable from mystical exaltation, from elevation to the divine diapason, of his humanity.

Therefore, religion, to be faithful to its essence and definition, must respond to and correspond with the call of life threatened by the forces that divide life in the world and in the human heart, and thus render humans incapable of accomplishing the mission of his/her formal and analogical individuation.

This division of the human person and within the human person is, in Africa, neither a panacea nor a fact of nature. Its sources and resources are found in the contemporary world. And among the determining factors of the present world order that

⁶² D. ZAHAN, *Religion, spiritualité et pensée africaines*, (Petite Bibliothèque Payot 374), Paris, Payot, 1970, p.13-14

⁶³ L. MAGESA, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, p.39

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.40.

nourish discord and rivalry in humans and in the world, it is convenient to cite what one calls today, 'globalisation'. The insertion into the global order generates within the human person and around him/her, in Africa, spiritual, ideological, economic and social forces that are contradictory; the effect is a constant threat to human life, in short of life in the continent. Mystical life becomes from thence, an effort, if not to eradicate these contradictory forces, at least an attempt to reconcile them; an attempt at their endogenous transformation into forces, powers of the light, for the personal and collective wellbeing of the human person.

The Programme of Reconciliation in African Traditional Religions

In order that the religions may be institutions of life, they have to work for the advent of the unity of man, the unity of Africa, the reconciliation of all the contradictory and rival forces in man and his universe. That is the meaning of African traditional religion. "Black African religion is first and foremost a quest for harmony between humans and nature, between a human person and the group, between humans and spirits, between the living and the dead"⁶⁶.

This action is not magical. It requires an attentive observation of the human situation in the world and the present world order from the perspective of globalisation⁶⁷. The latter is the most globalising fact of our time. It does not derive its motivating force from the continent. Its origins are situated in the West as well as the awakening of its soul, its economic order, and its political institutions, its scientific and technological tools. It is a "profound, durable and dogged movement. It extends its influence to all the spheres of our existence and all the sides of the globe; it reigns over

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See M. MALU Nyimi (dir.), *Mondialisation et évangélisation au Congo Démocratique. Perspectives pour une pastorale du temps présent*, Kinshasa, Cerdaf, 2007, p.51-94

all countries, shakes the traditions, the cultures and habits and leaves no alternatives to the societies of our time”⁶⁸.

According to critics, this movement is first and foremost economic and financial. As stated by Bishop Albert Rouet, “an egocentric globalisation defines the present transformations of the world which has become the talk of the day. Its law and fundamental nature are essentially economic”⁶⁹. Globalisation imperatively imposes the obligation of the accumulation of capital.

This accumulation is accompanied by the compression of the world-space into a “planet-village”⁷⁰ which economists call “market”. The market, in the context of global transformations, is a zone of production, consumption and exchange of goods and services, and by consequence, the circulation and meeting of persons, hence the dialogue of cultures. Globalisation is revealed in the suppression of obstacles to communication and in the abolition of borders that separate countries/peoples.

On this note, globalisation is perceived in Africa as a vector of civilisation and progress, a driving force for the distribution of knowledge, technology, information and culture. According to J. Ki-Zerbo, “it is an opportunity that has to be seized”. Africa, he writes, still has all her chances. Her inhabitants want to and can become actors of their development. Adversity and fatality are no longer the first and last words of the future”.⁷¹

However, this is where there lies a paradox. The circulation and use of goods enrol persons, communities and their geographic spheres into the global world order. They are enrolled and integrated into the present neo-liberal system. The neo-liberal order is a specific universe often described in the following terms: the

⁶⁸ Les enjeux de la mondialisation. IIIèmes journées philosophiques de Kimwenza, du 1^{er} au 4 avril 1998, Kinshasa, Loyola, 1998, p.167

⁶⁹ A.ROUET, Mondialisation et respect de l’homme, dans *Spiritus* (mars 2000) n.166, p.122

⁷⁰ M.GADOU Dakouri, les religions africaines face au défi de la mondialisation, dans *Spiritus* (mars 2000) n.166, p.65

⁷¹ J. Ki-ZERBO, Mondialisation, Une perspective du sud, in *Foi et Développement* (July-August 1998), n° 265, p. 1.

absolute priority of the market, the primacy accorded to exportation activities whose consequence is the unconditional support of transnational capital and the devaluation of the local currency, the reduction of the State through the privatisation of productive actives and services, social politics is subordinated to macro-economic demands⁷². Professor J. Kankwenda toes the same line:

The growth of conservative neo-liberalism brings about the disappearance of development as a category or preoccupation in social and economic politics....In fact, due to the dissolution of the Soviet empire, the dominant tendency in the northern hemisphere is the disengagement of government from the management of economic and social affairs, privatisations, deregulation and dismantling of the welfare state. Unfortunately, the fundamentalism of this credo has become the bible of the leading forces of globalisation⁷³.

This insertion appears in Africa as an extraversion which transforms hearts, institutions, structures and spirits into forces opposed to its development. Globalisation becomes contemporary to the neo-colonization of African peoples, the expropriation of their lands, the extraversion of their socio-political institutions and the perversion of their culture.

Economic forces, multinational companies and their local representatives, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the bilateral and multilateral money-lenders, organise the pauperisation of individuals and communities through the various

⁷² A. LAME, *The Globalization of Poverty*, in *Euntes Digest*, 33 (Sept. 2000); n° 3, p. 164.

⁷³ J. KANKWENDA Mbaya, *Le développement général de l'Afrique : du Plan d'action de Lagos (PAL) au NEPAD*, in Th. TSHIBANGU(ed), *L'Avenir de l'activité missionnaire « Ad Gentes »*. Perspectives pour le XXIème siècle. Congrès International de Missiologie « Tertio Millenio ». Actes du Congrès, Kinshasa, Mediapaul, 2005, p. 275.

economic stabilisation reforms, multiple programmes of structural adjustment and diverse “initiatives for poverty reduction”. “The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) serve the interests of the money-lenders because they assure (i) the reimbursement of debts despite the crisis situation of the economy in Africa, (ii) the promotion of exportations, hence the integration (of African economies) in the world market, in the process of globalisation favourable to them, (iii) the maintenance of the function assigned by the system to the present economic structures in Africa”⁷⁴.

These forces of economic exploitation cannot establish themselves durably without the instauration of a convenient political order. Hence economic powers create institutions and political personalities they subdue to their interests. States become the police entrusted with the surveillance of the triumphant ‘parade’ of the neo-liberal economy”⁷⁵. In other words, in this global process, the State is marginalised and reduced to specific functions, namely, the preparation of the terrain for the realisation of profit and the surveillance of its security”. It is the agent for the search for formulas of adaptation and auto-adjustment to pressures of globalisation and its “barons”⁷⁶. The State becomes a force of repression of the people’s search for development and life.

In order to stabilise its reign durably, politics mobilises the forces of culture, paternalism and “patrimonialism”. In fact, the interiorization of economic exploitation and political repression is a process of the transformation of Africa into a minor that consciously or unconsciously expects from his/her neo-liberal oppressor, brother of the same race or stranger, the resources for his/her personal and collective living. The oppressor is like a “Father” while the African is a “docile child”. It is the reign of

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 200/294.

⁷⁵ M. MALU Nyimi (dir), *Mondialisation et évangélisation au Congo Démocratique. Perspectives pour une pastorale du temps présent*, Kinshasa, Cerdaf, 2007, p. 56.

⁷⁶ J. KANKWENDA, Mbaya, *Le développement général de l’Afrique*.

resignation, of surrender to the good will of political leaders and holders of the means of production. This is what African theologians called “anthropological poverty”, “a preferential option for the ruin of the dignity of the human person, of his/her subjective and objective rights”⁷⁷, making her insensitive to the worldwide belonging and adulthood of human beings. Paternalism is doubled in the global context by “Patrimonialism”—the African passion for the appropriation of the common good for the benefit of individual interest⁷⁸. There is, in the African culture of globalisation, a perversion which makes it incompatible with the project of life of individuals and groups in the continent.

Paternalism and patrimonialism are like allegiances to global materialism, which has become an obstacle to the economy of religion in Africa, especially ATR, to the encounter and the communion of the adepts with the supernatural. “Globalisation is (in paternalism and patrimonialism) the repression of utopia in humans, of the capacity to open the self to God and to be God’s image, that is, to constantly go beyond one’s person, hence allowing one the power to construct it”⁷⁹. It is a culture of the ruin of human person and the death of God. The interiorization of the economic, political and cultural forces installs division and antagonism in the heart and spirit of the African, such that, as

⁷⁷ M. MALU Nyimi (dir), *Mondialisation et évangélisation au Congo Démocratique*, p. 81-82/123.

⁷⁸ See A. HOCHSCHILD, *King Leopold’s Ghost. A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. L. SPAAS, *How Belgium Colonized the Mind of the Congo. Seeking the Memory of an African People*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter. The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. See my book *Inversion culturelle et déplacement de la pratique chrétienne africaine. Préface à une théologie périphérique*, (KTC), Kampen, Kok, 1994, p.46-52; G. GRAN (ed), *Zaire, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, New York, Praeger Special Studies, 1978.

⁷⁹ A. ROUET, *Mondialisation et respect de l’homme*, in *Spiritus* (March 2000), n° 166, p. 126.

affirms the *Instrumentum Laboris* (art. 11) of the next Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa:⁸⁰

...the wounded, human heart is the ultimate hiding place for the cause of everything destabilizing the African continent. Selfishness nurtures greed, corruption and the allurements of gain. It is the driving force in the misappropriation of goods and riches destined for entire populations. The thirst for power leads to contempt for all the elementary rules of good governance, takes advantage of people's lack of knowledge, manipulates political, ethnic, tribal and religious differences and creates cultures where warriors are considered heroes and people need to be paid back for past sacrifices and wrongs committed. Basically, what blackens African society comes from the human heart.

At the long run, "the market has not been able to distribute equitably the dividends of globalisation. On the contrary, it has been an active negative agent."⁸¹ The effects of these global forces on the continent are disastrous: "accumulation of riches among the barons of globalisation and the rich countries, skeletal or even lack of economic growth in Africa, unemployment, poverty increase, generalisation of crime, migration to greener pastures, drug trafficking, alimentary insecurity, expansion of HIV, environmental degradation, etc. As stated by J. Ki-Zerbo: "Africa is experiencing a new form of slavery which is harder than the ones of the former times. It is no longer a question of men and women crossing the

⁸⁰ The 2nd Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa will hold in Rome from 4-25 October 2009, on the theme "The Church in Africa in the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. "You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world".

⁸¹ J. KANKWENDA Mbaya, « Le développement général de l'Afrique », in Th. T. TSHIBANGU, *L'avenir de l'activité missionnaire « Ad Gentes ». Perspectives pour le XXI^{ème} siècle*. Congrès international de missiologie « Tertio Millennio ». (Kinshasa, 11-17 juillet 2004), Kinshasa, Mediaspaul, 2005, p.289

Atlantic Ocean from Gorée to Louisiana, but the entire peoples of Africa are subdued and exploited in their own land”⁸².

This is where globalisation engenders in the consciousness of individuals and groups a “sentiment of frustration”. Paradoxically, this frustration is not synonymous with abdication, discouragement, resignation. On the contrary, it contains the imperative to re-qualify the globalisation which subdues it henceforth to the history of the personal and communal destiny, to the order of human transcendence. In this re-qualification there is a sort of response to incessant calls addressed to Africa towards freedom and responsibility in the global situation. “The continent, they say, must courageously assume the responsibility for the search for innovative ways and alternatives for another globalisation which will work for their happiness, with strategies for positioning diversified actors, including the State as the organ in-charge of social welfare and public interest as well as the market. Finally, the continent must position itself as an efficient actor of a controlled insertion into globalisation, not only as an agent for the search for formulas of adaptation and auto-adjustment to pressures from globalisation and its “barons”⁸³.

This re-qualification is not only a project. In Africa, it is a history in progress. It is accomplished in the clear consciousness of the reality of globalisation. It is the work of the international community to participate in the formation of the citizens on the nature, the challenges, the benefits and the dangers of globalisation. In Africa, this consciousness must be accompanied with a history of richness, with an adequate concept of development of which the initiation requires the creation of endogenous and efficient poles⁸⁴.

⁸² J. Ki-KIZERBO, « Mondialisation, Une Perspective du sud », in *Foi and Développement* (July-August 1998), n° 265, col. 3, p. 3.

⁸³ K. KANKWENDA Mbaya, *Le développement général de l'Afrique*.

⁸⁴ The « Nande » an ethnic group in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo represent *mutatis mutandis*, through its elites, especially the business men, a critical integration into the demands of mondialisation. See, P.

Their extension will then become the point of departure of a different economic world transformation, globalisation with a human face.

The new globalisation is not a sinecure. It is the collective work subjects who engender it, filled with the culture of "global citizenship" that does not confine the actors of the new global transformation into the individualistic, ethnic, regional and nationalistic corners, but enrolls them in the general history of humanity which serves as anchor for the economy of the vital force of God.

Re-qualification, after frustration or "the consciousness of African alienation"⁸⁵, is like a thorn in the flesh of globalisation, one of its ineluctable antitheses. In Africa, it is not a slogan. It is present in what some call "African responses" to globalisation, such as, according to J. Kankwenda Mbaya, the "the Declaration of Strategy of Monrovia (Liberia 1979) and the "Lagos Plan of Action"(Nigeria, 1980). These initiatives among others have one specificity, namely, they profess an auto-centred African economy and regional integration as strategy for its realisation. "We resolve, on behalf of our governments and our peoples", said the heads of State and Governments gathered in Monrovia, "to promote the economic and social development and the integration of our economies, towards the growth of self-dependence and in order to

KABAMBA, *New Forms of Life in the Debris of the State*. Thesis, New York, Columbia University, 2008.

⁸⁵ On these african responses to globalisation, one can read attentively the following presentations at the International Symposium of the Centre d'Etudes des Religions Africaines, organised at Kinshasa, from 7-11 April 2003: Wola Mbale, *La mondialisation de Marrakech à nos jours, dans Religions Traditionnelles Africaines et Mondialisation. Enjeux indenteaire et transculturalité. Actes du VIIe Colloque International du CERA (Kinshasa, 7-11 April 2003)*, Kinshasa, Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 2004, p. 25-45 ; OKANA N'Siawi, *Les Unions économiques régionales : Alternatives à la Mondialisation*, in *ibid.* p. 46-63 ; MUSHI Mugumo, *Les nouvelles initiatives africaines. Perspectives d'appropriation de la mondialisation*, in *Ibid.* p. 175-190. MBWEBWA Kalala, *L'Union Africaine en contexte de la mondialisation. Chance et/ou risque*, in *ibid.* p. 219-229.

favour an endogenous development for the edification at the national, sub-regional and regional levels of a dynamic and interdependent African economy, in order to establish every year specific programmes for the actualisation of this sub-regional, regional and continental cooperation”⁸⁶. These initiatives are like antidotes to the actions of the international community, especially, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as well as those of the bilateral and multilateral backers (money lenders) whose reforms and action plans are simply destined to fix African economies at the level of the ship of the global neo-liberal economy, thereby abandoning the entire people in the hands of the forces of pauperisation and death.

This reflection shows that human destiny is, at the heart of the history of contemporary Africa, the theatre of struggle between the forces of death and the forces of life. It follows that life is threatened, hence the imperative of liberation and reconciliation. In reality, human beings are not isolated entities. They are connected to the global order that cannot be dissociated from religious beliefs, particularly ATR. Hence, ATR is challenged by globalisation and their imperative exigencies of reconciliation.

It is obvious that ATR provides economies of the encounter and communion between God and humans. Its mission is inseparable from the communion, the vital participation, the vertical harmony of humans and the invisible world; the horizontal harmony with the visible world against chaos that is always omnipresent and threatening. It is therefore, a minister of justice, peace and reconciliation in the continent⁸⁷. Being faithful to this reality implies, for ATR, being involved in the initiatives of

⁸⁶ Text quoted by J. KANKWENDA Mbaya, *Le développement général de l'Afrique*, p. 304-305.

⁸⁷ See KIBANDA Matungila, *La Spiritualité africaine face à la mondialisation. La quête de maat chez les Bawoyo du Bas-Congo et les Bambasa de l'Ituri à l'heure d'épreuve de la rationalité du conflit et de l'hégémonie planétaire, in Religions Traditionnelles Africaines et Mondialisation*, p. 15-18.

reconciling the antagonistic forces at work in humans and in the globalized world.

Reconciliation here is a very arduous task. It is not only constituted of verbal forgiveness, embracing between individuals or even in personal penitential rituals and collective purification. It is indeed more of a movement of correspondence of political institutions, economic structures and cultural traditions and religious traditions with the peoples' aspiration for life, social justice, solidarity and truth. Religions are therefore called to show publicly their active and efficient presence at the podiums of institutions where the paths of reconciliation are discussed and decided.

Because it is in a way clandestinely linked to the persons of the leaders of the faithful, heads of State or simple citizens, ATR is for men and women, expected motor of reconciliation in the continent. It follows that reconciliation calls for the recognition of the leadership of religions, especially ATR at all the levels of the society. Hence a place has to be legally reserved to their members, say leaders, in all African institutions in charge of reconciliation in the continent, not only in the "Truth and Reconciliation" commissions, but also in the sub-regional, regional, continental and international initiatives for the appropriation of globalisation, to reconcile its forces with the aspiration for life in individuals and communities of the continent and the world⁸⁸.

In other to actualise this programme, ATR is expected to denounce the inadequacy of the policy which consists in separating the profane and the sacred, the secular and the religious, secularism and religion; a policy that leads to the privatisation of the religious or even its fossilisation for the benefit of the publicity of the profane. The law of the African religious tradition excludes every dichotomy between the profane and the sacred, the latter being the

⁸⁸ There are many of these initiatives in Africa, for example, African Union (AU), The Economic Community of Central Africa, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The Common Market for East and South Africa (COMESA), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

context where the former is lived⁸⁹. Belief is inseparable from involvement in favour of humans and for liberation from the forces which oppress and threaten human beings. There is no religion without involvement for the promotion of the dignity of the human person and for reconciliation. African Traditional Religions are an agenda, a programme for reconciliation in the context of globalisation.

Conclusion

Reconciliation appeared as a constitutive task of African Traditional Religions. It is an internal demand. In reality, ATR is human phenomenon. It finds in humans and in God, the profound roots of its institution. God is celebrated as the primal force, the initial and initiating force whose life is the seed for the creation of other lives, that of man and nature.

In ATR, there is no adhesion to God that does not embody openness to the human person and life. Life appears in this perspective as a constitutive dimension of the human person, an unavoidable distinction of his essence. Its definition is inseparable from the consciousness one has of the destiny of the human being. This is perceived as a process which makes humans, a being, a house of hope.

Life therefore appears as the horizon of this indomitable hope of the human being. In that sense, it is a virtue in man, a promise of his being. One thing particular with virtue is that is rich with the demand of individuation. Following this, life is not the mirror of 'man,' it becomes concrete in 'man'; the same applies to animals and even inorganic plants.

Life is hence a gift as well as a task. The generation of humans awakes them from slumber, brings them out of solitude in order to

⁸⁹ See the final communiqué in K.APPIAH-KUBI and S. TORRES (eds), *African Theology en Route. Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians*, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1979, p. 191-192.

constitute them beings in solidarity. Hence the human person is one in its complexity, or rather complex in its simplicity: a simple composite. The human structure is made of a diversity of components. Apart from destiny, humans person endorses the visible and invisible worlds.

However, the unity in humans is fragile and threatened. The composites in humans are beings elevated to the human level, such that there are in them the will to power, egoism, greed, which makes them antagonistic and antithetic forces in humans and in the world. There emerges, in the present global world order, impure hearts, imperfect, unaccomplished, thirsting for egotistic and insatiable interests, political reforms, economic initiatives, cultural and technological innovations, as well as forces of destruction of life and of the complex unity of the human person making one powerless in the battle field of life against death.

It is in this context that human life is religious experience. Humans are divided between the forces of light, goodness and life on one hand and forces of evil and death on the other. Religion, in order to be faithful to its mission becomes a movement of involvement for human liberation, for reconciliation which consist essentially, through dialogue, in healing, and exorcising the forces of death. It does not only consist in verbal forgiveness among individuals or even individual penitential rituals or rituals of collective purification. It is a correspondence of economic structures and cultural and religious traditions with the peoples' aspiration for life, social justice, solidarity and truth.

Reconciliation is a mark of leadership of African Traditional Religions. This leadership has to be legally recognized. This recognition is an obligation for African politicians to provide the necessary place to African Traditional Religions in their private and public spaces where questions of life and reconciliation are discussed in the continent, not only in the "Truth and Reconciliation" commissions, but also in the national, sub-regional, regional, continental and even international organisations.

Translated from French to English by
Eugene Uzukwu and Bede Ukwuije

BOOK REVIEW

**Mourning the Passing of a Pioneer of African Church History,
Ogbu Kalu (1942-2009)**

Ogbu U. Kalu 2008. *Clio in a Sacred Garb: Essays on Christian Presence and African Responses, 1900-2000*. Trenton, New Jersey, US & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press.

The untimely recent death of Ogbu Kalu (1942-2009), a giant among African church historians, occurred just after a year when he published two major books and co-edited a third, continuing the impressive publishing output he maintained over his sadly foreshortened life. As a friend and admirer of Kalu's, I am honored to reflect here on this collection of essays, each of which was first prepared in the first years of the 21st century, and use the occasion to consider his broader significance for our appreciation of African Christianity.

A longtime professor at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka who long cut a considerable figure in global Christian theological circles, Kalu moved in 2003 to McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, not far from the residence of Barack Obama. The lecture he gave upon assuming the inaugural Henry Winters Luce Professorship in World Christianity at McCormick which he held at his death opens this collection and generates its title, at the same time identifying an abiding theme of the ten other essays as well. Kalu unashamedly dons Clio's mantle as an historian (she being the ancient Greek muse of history), and insists repeatedly that to capture something like African Christianity, its religious underpinnings must be neither ignored nor subjected to academic reduction to sociological or other factors. Instead the faith-inspired bases of Christian vitality in Africa must instead be appreciated, understood, and celebrated—so that for this subject at least, Clio *must* don sacred garb, if the treatment is to be anything other than cursory.

Readers familiar with Kalu's work—especially his *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in*

African Christianity (2000), his edited volume *African Christianity: An African Story* (2005 and republished in 2007), and his more recent *African Pentecostalism* (2008), not to mention a number of articles appearing in collections and periodicals in recent years—will recognize here familiar themes and subjects. Indeed, some sections are repeated intact, or very nearly so, from previously released writings.

As he does elsewhere, Kalu takes seriously an historian's concern for temporality, and at the heart of this collection offers four chapters (chapters 6-9) that address stages in the evolution of African Christianity over the past century or so, each organized around a specific period of time and contesting historiographic emphases of previous scholarly assessments. In chapter 6, late 19th- and early 20th-century Ethiopianism, early on pigeonholed as an attempt by disloyal Christian Africans to seek power at missionary expense and later as proto-nationalism in religious guise, is reconsidered by Kalu as an early African response to the Spirit-led (or, as he says, "pneumatic") potential of the Gospel, heretofore muted by expatriate missionary caution. In chapter 7, Kalu argues that the Christian prophetic movements emerging prior to World War II in various parts of Africa share in the same pneumatic instinct, and cannot be treated as resulting from outside agitators like the African-American missionaries sometimes blamed by colonizers and other missionaries for "stirring up the natives." In chapter 8, Kalu shows that missionary attempts to retain control over their churches after World War II through what he dubs "passive revolution" rarely emphasized genuine African concerns, but were mainly pursuing self-preservation. Happily, they were for the most part undermined by African initiatives. Finally, in chapter 9 Kalu argues that the recent explosion of Pentecostal and charismatic vitality in African Christianity reflects African rather than foreign energizing.

These middle four essays, historical overviews with post-colonial, post-missionary, and Africa-centered coloring, are sandwiched by more eclectic pieces. The opening title essay puts humorous self-deprecation to good use by highlighting the

complexities of the present moment in historical scholarship. Kalu observes today both a renewed awareness of Christianity as a world religion and a scholarly discomfort with what used to be called "church history." Putting these together, he discerns an urgent need to overcome analytical approaches incapable of appreciating the religiosity of many of the world's newer Christians. As he writes, "[I]t is difficult to tell the story of the church by rejecting its essence" (16), and "For the largest number of Christians in the world, God intervenes directly in their everyday lives through the power of the Holy Spirit" (18). Consequently, "Only a story that takes theological realities into its arsenal of facts can plumb the realities of our time" (20). Chapter 2 examines the primal worldview of Africans and how it sometimes undercuts contemporary ecological concerns. Yet that worldview can also be critically drawn upon for a renewed ecology to overcome an "ambivalent eco-ethics" (43). This is followed by an historical examination of changing views of poverty in colonial West Africa, foregrounding the ways colonialism led to new forms of destitution for which traditional societies had no adequate responses.

Chapter 4 offers a study of an African-American missionary couple in late 19th-century Sierra Leone that serves to recover the long-submerged history of African-Americans in the evangelization of western Africa, while chapter 5 reviews the extensive discussion of African Christian education which took place at the groundbreaking 1910 Edinburgh Conference. This conference, which brought together an unprecedented number of Christian missionary groups, had no African Christians, an absence that Kalu adduces to partially explain the internally self-contradictory nature of the reports.

After the middle four historical chapter, Kalu continues in chapter 10 with a discussion of James Cone's influence on the 1985 Kairos Document emanating from South Africa, and shows how Cone himself was shaped by the Confessing Church's 1933 Barmen Declaration authored by Karl Barth. The collection concludes with a programmatic overview of theological education in contemporary Africa, first delivered in 2007 in Accra. Here Kalu

acknowledges the academic, pastoral, financial, and structural challenges facing ministerial formation in many parts of the continent.

Throughout, Kalu insists that African Christians must tell their own stories about how “the rain of the Gospel” met them (15), and also that the shape of Christianity’s emergence in Africa depends on the pre-existing underlying cultural predispositions that shaped African appropriations of the Gospel. As he does regularly, he also draws upon an impressive array of other disciplines and writers as he makes his points, and fears not to attack views that he feels misread African Christianity as a foreign religion.

This volume also contains some of what I have felt are limitations in Kalu’s approach. First, his numerous references to other scholars tend to be undeveloped and rarely engage them in depth, so that his use of their ideas can seem self-serving—a particular problem when he disagrees with them, as he does with Paul Gifford, for instance. The many and rather contradictory references to extraversion, externality, and related terms (x, 100, 181, 211, and “extravenous,” 144) exemplify this problem, for Gifford’s use is often more subtle than Kalu’s depiction, and the term “extraversion” is used in a related but different way by political scientist Jean-François Bayart.

In a second and related issue, he often uses ideas without referring to their source in other scholars. Examples include his multiple references in this book to A. E. Hirschmann’s triplex of exit, loyalty, and voice, used by Kalu to consider differing African responses to Christianity; James Scott’s notion of legibility, which he uses to consider missionary goals in relationship to African Christians; E. P. Thompson’s notion of the moral economy, used to consider the shared expectations created in African Christians and missionaries about their mutual accountability to each other; Robin Horton’s notion of religion as engaged in explanation, prediction, and control; and to the term “the intimate enemy,” used variously, but in an important way by colonial theorist Ashis Nandy. I do not think that Kalu is consciously hiding his dependence—he elsewhere mentions these sources, and his lack of

acknowledgement reflects instead the familiar way he draws upon these concepts—but he sometimes deploys them in ways their originators (or the mediators by which he came to awareness of these terms and ideas) might dispute.

Third, at times in his effort to—very appropriately, in my opinion—emphasize the essential African nature of the Christianity that has appeared on the continent, he overgeneralizes about the “African worldview” within which this Christianity has appeared. He asserts at one point, “Despite the variety of names and forms, African traditional religions do genuinely exhibit an astonishing uniformity of emphasis, which make merely local variations on a few axiomatic themes to a much greater degree than we find in Christianity or Hinduism” (29). This may be the case—though I have my doubts, and arguing the case would be difficult indeed. What is certain is that Kalu’s depictions of such traditional religions and the worldview in which they exist clearly depend on a Nigerian, and often an Igbo template, one that others in Africa (for example, Nilotic-language-speaking pastoralists, forest-dwellers from Congo, or Kalahari desert residents like the Khoi-San) might not share.

One additional unfortunate shortcoming in this volume is the large number of misspellings and typographical errors that plague the text. To take only one example, the apartheid-era massacre in South Africa took place neither in Shaperville (286) nor Sharperville (288).

These criticisms, however, do nothing to take away from the intelligence and persuasiveness of these essays, and from the importance of Kalu’s larger career as teacher, scholar, and advocate. A 2005 collection that honored him for his work in training and inspiring a younger generation of African church historians underscored his legacy, and these essays display it again. No one in the past two decades has done more to capture the complexity and vitality of African Christianity than Ogbu Kalu, and his passing represents the loss of an irreplaceable contributor to church and scholarship.

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Richard R. Gaillardetz. *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*. By Theology in Global Perspective Series. New York: Orbis Books, 2008. Pp. xxiv + 312. Paper. \$24.01. ISBN 9781570757693.

This book provocatively epitomizes a compelling theological framework for comprehending something of the nature and mission of the Church with attention to its global, postmodern, and ecumenical import in the twenty-first century.

Gaillardetz traces the provenance of the communitarian consciousness of the Church to ancient Israelite faith as shaped by the exodus event. In that event Israel was envisioned as a priestly people, a royal, and holy nation (Ex. 19: 5-6). By that event Israel became a people called to be a servant community by God, fulfilling God's intention for the world. Similarly, the post-Easter encounter of the risen Lord constituted his disciples into a community that was empowered by the Holy Spirit for mission in the world. In this way, G. presents a paradigm that brings the Christological and Pneumatological foundations as well as the Institutional and Charismatic dimensions of the Church together. This vision also bears testimony to Pauline understanding of the Church as a *koinonia* of believers called by God by the power of the Spirit into common life in Christ and for ministry and service (*diakonia*) in the life of the community (1 Cor. 12: 27-31). One hopes that this more holistic approach to ecclesiology will set a standard for future research on this subject.

This awareness of early Christian communitarianism inspires G. to favor a catholicity that connotes an ecclesial unity that is always a unity-in-diversity and not a stifling uniformity as has been the perpetual temptation of the Church. G. is for a catholicity that presupposes a dialogical mission since all cultures are potentially receptive to the gospel, and all cultures have gifts to offer for the enrichment of the gospel; he thus envisions a communion ecclesiology that is all inclusive. G. demonstrates in this book a firm grasp of the foundational issues of communion ecclesiological discourse today; he displays competence, ability, and an openness

to engage diverse approaches of experts in the field including the magisterium of the Catholic Church as well as Orthodox theologians and others from diverse faith traditions.

For G., the Church as communion is fundamentally a People called by the Triune God and built up for mission through various forms of ministries. Thus, Vatican II's recovery of the theology of baptism which guarantees the fundamental equality and common dignity of all the People of God, as well as charisms, did not only significantly undermine lay/clergy separation, but also repositioned the necessary role of the ministerial priesthood within the broader perspective of the priesthood of the baptized. This recovery, moreover, not only reoriented ministry from one of power to that of Christian service and pastoral care but also paved way for a re-emergence of lay ministries in the Church. G. here explores further what he wrote elsewhere that the dominant magisterial characterization of lay vocation as secular hardly offers an ontological definition of the Laics but merely a typological one.

G. competently mines communion ecclesiology with both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* in mind. G. reimagines different elements of the Church such as apostolicity, laity, episcopacy, papacy, mission, etc, with a profound ecumenical sensitivity. I must however, observe that in matters of Church structures, G. appears to be more sympathetic with the view that such structures are more culturally determined and consequently, should be subject to change when they no longer serve the purpose for which they were established *ab initio*. Though he mentions the Holy Spirit with respect to these structures, but he fails to substantiate or rather sustain the tension between the cultural contingency and the role of the movement of the Spirit in guiding the Church in the development of such structures. It will be great to consider filling the above lacuna in subsequent edition in order to strike a balance.

The aforementioned shortcoming notwithstanding, G. has written this book with an impressive scholarship that captures the contemporary global and postmodern situation of the Church and a consequent communion ecclesiology, all inclusive enough to meet the demands of diversity in the Church as well as the demands of

ecumenical and intercultural interreligious dialogue. It is a book that is a must read for all professors of ecclesiology, graduate students, undergraduates, and its modesty renders it appealing to all who love the Church.

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